THE REBELS

by

ALFRED NEUMANN

THE DEVIL
(*Der Teufel*)
1928

In preparation

GUERRA

THE REBELS

BY ALFRED NEUMANN

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY
HUNTLEY PATERSON

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Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro
Degli angeli, che non furon ribelli,
Nè fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sè foro.

Dante, Inferno iii, 37–39.

". . . with that ill band
Of angels mix'd, who nor rebellious proved,
Nor yet were true to God, but for themselves
Were only" . . .

Cary's Translation.

" How good it would be to write a work of art, in which there would be clearly expressed the flowing nature of man; that he, one and the same man, is now a villain, now an angel, now a wise man, now an idiot, now a strong man, now the most impotent being."

The Journal of Leo Tolstoi (March 23, 1898)
Translated by Rose Strunsky.

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INTRODUCTION

Gioia's sin was grievous and terrible, wellnigh unspeakable. So terrible was it that it had to be borne by two people, Gioia himself and his daughter. It was one of those outrageous deeds that demand not the death, but the life of their victim, and become one with them, one in tissue and in time, to be neither overlooked nor forgotten. Sins of this kind, which have become, so to speak, alive, possess the same power as the avenging deity himself, to break or to bend the life of the sinner. Checca was the victim, Gioia the criminal. But his life was not brittle enough to be shattered. The avenging deity had not endowed him with the glassy hardness which might mercifully have been smashed to atoms. He insisted on punishing the guilty man to the uttermost, to the last breath. Gioia's life must be made bent as his body.

But for his sin, Gioia would probably have been of no greater importance than any of the other splinters of the great French Revolutionary machine, which in those days were lying rusting in all the refuse pits of Europe. But these human fragments of an exploded idea were for the most part devoid of feeling and content in their apathy; while their apathy itself was to some extent respected by the new Age, or at least not disturbed by it. But even this miserable contentment was denied to the splinter that was Gioia, for his heinous sin, drawing him out of the pit, forged him into a nail for every hammer to belabour.

Gioia, a musician, and scion of a middle class family, was one of a party of Roman Jacobins, who on the 28th of December, 1797, assembled in arms before the Palazzo Corsini, the residence of Joseph Bonaparte, and demanded from the

French Republic protection and help against Papal domination. This demonstration, and the bloodshed and disorder which followed it, led to Berthier's occupation of Rome and to the foundation of the Roman Republic.

Even Gioia, the musician, had a post in the new Government, as Commissioner of the Fine Arts, a position which he alone among the new rulers did not turn to account for the purpose of extorting money on a grand scale and feathering his own nest, but used only for defraying the costs of the huge drinking bouts he used to hold with his large circle of friends among the Bohemians of Rome. But such extravagance cost so little in those days, that, with the money at his disposal, he was also able, not only to pay his friends' debts, but even to redeem the articles they had pawned. Thus he acquired a very pleasing popularity, though it never made much impression upon him, because during the greater part of the time, he was completely and hopelessly drunk.

Another fact about him which deserves mention is that, at about this time, whether as the result of his state of perpetual besotment, or because he wanted to follow the revolutionary fashion, he had, in accordance with the simplified Jacobin rite of *sotto l'albero,* as it was called, gone through a ceremony of marriage with a girl whom he imagined he had met only on the previous evening. There would have been nothing remarkable about this, had it not been for the fact that he already had a wife, to whom he had been properly married in church in pre-revolutionary days, and a twelve-year-old daughter, who lived somewhere in the Trastevere. He had never troubled much about them, and in the excitement and intoxication following upon his appointment as Commissioner, he had entirely forgotten them. But he was reminded of them, one fine day, when a gaunt female stepped into his office, and without any preamble proceeded to box his ears. She was his legal wife. She had just hurried round from administering similar castigation to his Jacobinic wife, and could only be prevailed upon to withdraw by means of a substantial sum

of money. Throughout the scene, his daughter, Checca, a long-legged hobbledehoy, stood stolidly looking on in a corner.

But this annoyance was soon to be eclipsed by a worse one, which followed quickly on its heels. Bonaparte swept the Government of Rome clear of all the rabble, although they were Jacobin, or, as his victims themselves suspected, precisely because they were Jacobin; and they clenched their fists in their trouser pockets. Gioia was of the number. He too clenched his fists secretly. But quite suddenly — just as his wife had done on the previous day, an officer of General Dabrowski's Polish Legion, which, with the rest of that well disciplined corps, was executing the Commander-in-Chief's orders for a general clearance, burst roughly into Gioia's office. His face was as hairy as a Cossack's, and he wore a strange peaked cap. He struck Gioia's writing table twice with his riding whip, making the dust fly, and each time, as the switch whistled within a hair's breadth of Gioia's nose, he hissed out barbaric syllables. Then he threw the Commissioner out of the room; not merely with words and gestures, but with two incredibly strong hands, one of which seized him by the collar, the other by the seat of his trousers, and lifting him up, flung him in a bold parabola out of the door. To make matters worse, Gioia was not quite sober when the man entered to discharge his duty. Thus his knowledge of French entirely forsook him and the protests he uttered consisted of an avalanche of Roman curses which made not the faintest impression on the violent man. Consequently, in his progress to the door, he entirely lost his presence of mind, and was only conscious of strange hands roughly pushing him forward, and he did not recover his self-possession until, bruised and battered, he found himself on the steps leading from the Capitoline Piazza to the town.

And now it seemed to be his fate to find pleasure in insensibility and headlong falls. For things moved fast and furiously with him. His state of perpetual drunkenness protected

him from despair, madness and broken bones. He was one of the band whose fists were clenched inside their trouser pockets. And this soon became the device of a party. Why not indeed? One revolution begets another! Had they not learnt to be furies by profession, desperadoes by instinct? Their leader was one Cerrachi, the sculptor, who had filled an important position in the Jacobin Government. The meeting place was Gioia's home in the Trastevere, an obscure retreat, favourable for conspiracies. His wife seemed amenable enough, having been won over by a night of love — what did such things matter to Gioia! and kept out of the way most of the time. From her corner Checca, his daughter, stared silent and motionless at the men. They were wild creatures and exquisite haters. What was their object? Verily it was old and sacred enough — Death to the tyrant! Who was the tyrant? He was the betrayer of the Revolution, the Usurper, Bonaparte. Gioia, dead drunk, played the *Marseillaise* and *" Ça ira "* on his violin, and then suddenly lost himself in a theme by Palestrina, on which he played variations in the most masterly manner. And yet his fellow conspirators were still roaring their *" formez vos bataillons! "* It was somewhat confusing! — Checca, from her corner, stared in mute astonishment at her father, who with tears, born of enthusiasm and intoxication, in his eyes, went on playing.

It all took place very quickly. The tumult and whirl of this nebulous existence was not really disturbed for a second. On one of these drunken evenings, in the midst of the singing, the violin playing, the conspiring and the whole jumble of life and death, Cerrachi, the sculptor and leader, who was always the least drunk of the party, suddenly roared: " Hush! " and pulled out his pistols. And they were silent — silent as mice! Then came the sound of horses' hoofs ringing on the road outside, the clanking of swords and words of command. The conspirators tried to peep out of the window and saw the flare of torches reflected in the broad swords and the forbidding helmets of the Papal dragoons, who had surrounded the house,

the street and the whole quarter. Gioia gave a shout, either from fear or from drunken exuberance. But Cerrachi gave him a blow in the belly with his pistol, making him fall across the table and vomit. Whereupon Cerrachi sprang to the door. But it was too late. Soldiers of the Polish Legion were already surging up the stairs. Cerrachi shot the first one, and the deed cost him his head; for he was the only one of the conspirators who was executed. Checca sat silent and stiff in her corner, and watched the soldiers bind the men's hands, stamp the violin to pieces underfoot, and tie up her unconscious father, and drag him downstairs like a dirty and malodorous bundle of rubbish. Her mother had vanished.

In a prison somewhere in the south of France, Gioia came to his senses, and began to reflect — an exercise for which he had plenty of time. The only things that troubled him were the iron ball which pulled on his left leg when he moved, his burning craving for alcohol, and the terrible lusts of his body, which was quite unaccustomed to abstinence. But the desires that tormented him only increased the rage provoked by the humiliating letters N. B. — Napoleon Bonaparte — branded on his back, by the sweat of his labours in the quarries or on the roads, by the pains in his limbs during the long nights on the damp flags of his cell, by the vermin, the cold, the heat, the floggings and all the other torture; but above all by meditation. When at length his cogitations brought him to the conclusion that his first wife, who had always been deceitful, servile, and invisible, had informed the authorities about the plot, his brain began to plan the punishment that he would mete out to her. And when once he had made up his mind about this, his brain had nothing more to occupy it. Finally, all he was conscious of was the whirling of the wheels of time within and about him. He enjoyed the merciful anodyne of utter apathy. But for this, the smallest thought of revolt would have sent him mad, and he would have dashed out his brains against the thick walls of his cell. It was the last gift of mercy he was ever to enjoy; for with his reprieve, which suddenly burst upon his loneliness like

a fierce ray of sunlight, hurting his weakened eyes, the door to sin was opened.

The amnesty of the Coronation Year, 1804, was not supposed to apply to those who had conspired against the life of the Emperor. And it was difficult to discover who had been responsible for including the former musician and Government Commissioner, Gioia, on the list of reprieved, or for preventing him from being deported to Cayenne. But, to cut a long story short, his prison doors were opened, and he was freed from his chains. At first he did not know how to walk with his ankles unshackled, and fell over his own legs which seemed much too light, and were in any case twisted with gout. He was given a couple of bright gold Napoleon pieces, and a suit of civilian clothes, and was told that some one was waiting for him at the prison gate. Silent and besotted, Gioia contemplated the Emperor's Roman profile on the coins, and then scratched the scars of the Emperor's initials on his right shoulder-blade. He chuckled. Those branded letters had a habit of itching when he was excited, and the feeling was not altogether unpleasant.

"Hi, Gioia, do you hear?" cried the Basque warder, who was not a bad fellow and had come to feel a certain attachment to the patient little Italian, "a tall female is waiting for you. Oh well, there'll be something doing tonight, eh?"

Gioia halted and looked at the speaker with a curious expression on his face.

"Yes," he said, with heavy lips, for he had almost forgotten how to speak, "yes, I shall thrash her to death."

"Are you mad, you ruffian? That young thing? She could not have harmed you in any way, surely! Why she could only have been a child when you came—"

"Young?" cried Gioia in surprise, and he went his way. It was Checca! He recognised her immediately, although she had meanwhile become a woman, a little thin perhaps, but not unattractive. He gave her his hand and felt a warm gush of blood surge to his heart. She still had the same somewhat stony

features which could not smile — for even now they remained grave. The couple said nothing, not a word, until the last formalities had been performed, and Gioia had been given his passport. And then they moved silently away.

When they reached a bend in the high-road, and the massive structure of the prison vanished behind a friendly hill, Checca began to speak. In the next village, the church steeple of which could already be seen, a carriage was waiting. They were going to drive to Toulon. Yes, she had been living in Toulon for about a year. Gioia looked at her, and there was a question and a frown in his eyes. Mother had already been dead a long time, Checca told him, in her calm laconic way, that is to say, she had been missed a few weeks after the arrest of the conspirators and subsequently her body almost unrecognisable, had been pulled out of the Tiber. Probably she had been thrown into the river by some one. Checca ceased speaking. Gioia gesticulated wildly and tried to say something. But in the end he held his peace. Suddenly he burst out laughing. His laugh sounded horrible. Checca looked at him without any sign of astonishment or disgust.

"Yes," she said simply, "I actually know that they flung her into the river; because I was told so by the Party later on."

"By what Party?"

Checca shook her head and made no reply. Gioia bit his lips. They continued on their way in silence. Checca looked as if she had talked enough. Then, in order to say something, he enquired:

"What do you live on in Toulon?"

"On men, of course."

"Yes, I see — of course," he murmured and looked at her askance. She was wearing a silk dress and good shoes. Over her shoulder she had a black lace mantilla and a white lace bonnet which fell in attractive folds about her black hair. And she could afford a carriage too! God, what could one say to such things!

After all the carriage was no more than a two-wheeled trap,

drawn by a donkey and driven by a little Savoyard. But there was no great hurry. They sat close to each order, and were jogged merrily from side to side. Checca smelt of scent. Gioia was transported to a world of wholly forgotten feelings. It was like being slightly intoxicated.

"Do you know what you are going to do now?" she enquired. He started.

"Who? I? No, I haven't the slightest idea."

"Well, it doesn't matter," she rejoined. "I know, if you don't. After all you belong to the Party."

Gioia did not understand. But he answered carelessly:

"I . . . but I am surely free . . ."

Checca raised her thick eyebrows, which joined above her nose.

"Pooh!" she exclaimed, "you are not free! The Party got you out through their representative in Paris . . ."

And she pointed behind her with her thumb. "You owe it some thanks."

"Thanks . . ."

"Yes. By the by, you may as well live with me, until they decide what to do with you."

"But what if I won't let them do anything with me?"

Checca gave him a glance full of evil portent. The journey was no longer quite so jolly.

The girl occupied a room in a small dirty house in the neighbourhood of the docks. When they reached it, the terrible evening was already fast approaching. The room was small and reeked of the scent Checca bore on her person. He became uneasy. There was a bed, a table and a couch in the room. That was all he saw. And the more he drank the less he saw. He drank heavily. Soon all he could see was Checca with her stolid features, which could not produce a smile — not even now; not even when to the man himself the world had become nothing more than a flaming red halo about her wild black hair. At last his body broke loose from the six years of solitude in prison. Checca seized him by the throat; but she made no

sound, and he possessed the strength of a madman. And then all of a sudden she ceased to struggle with him.

The monstrous outrage to which he had subjected her flashed through her mind almost simultaneously with the moment of horror in which it was perpetrated, and seizing hold of her body and soul, soon left her a totally different creature—Checca. When on the following day, broken in spirit and full of remorse he awoke, he knew that it had been no terrible nightmare. For over there, on the bed, the girl, sitting up, loomed still against the wall, with her inflexible features. She did not speak, but everything she did betrayed the fact that the thing was there, and always would be there. Sin lived with him, and by its very presence held him in its claws. He would never be able to escape it again, and it proceeded to hunt him through every chamber of his earthly hell. He was obedient, because to be disobedient would have been even more terrible. When men visited his daughter, or when with a slight movement of her hand she conveyed to him that there was somebody coming up the stairs behind her, he would creep behind the narrow partition dividing the room. God knows that it was cruel and hard to bear. But what could he do? What was the good of all his despair and his loathing of himself? He was jealous of her. But at last, one day, there came a gentleman with a sallow complexion and a long beard which was too black to be genuine. He had not come to see Checca, who stood strangely resigned in a corner; he had come to see him, Gioia.

"Gioia?" he said with a faint note of enquiry in his voice, and he repeated the name in matter of fact tones, like a sergeant-major reciting the roll-call: "Gioia Benedetto."

"Yes," replied Gioia timidly. The gentleman cleared his throat, and without mincing matters told him that his crime was known to the Party. Gioia's face grew grey and his chin trembled like an old man's.

"What — what crime?" he stammered. The bearded gentleman made no reply. He only raised his rattan cane from

his knees, and pointed its gold knob airily in Checca's direction.

"God Almighty . . . her . . . her!" Gioia groaned and tried to catch his daughter's eye. But she looked coldly away.

"Please let us be brief," said the visitor firmly, and with his hand he cut the air as with a knife. "All that sort of thing is superfluous. For the time being, in recognition of your revolutionary efforts in the past, the Party will not report the case to the authorities. And provided you prove useful and devoted it will even do its utmost to hush up the affair. So it all depends upon yourself. To cut a long story short, you have been transferred under the designation of G.B. to the mobile executive section."

"As G.B.?" Gioia enquired, stunned and utterly confused.

"Yes, yes," replied the gentleman with some impatience. "Henceforward you will be known as G.B. We never use names, for obvious reasons. For instance, I am F.R., the director of the Piedmont section. For the present you will receive orders from me alone, and will learn no other initials, but only come into touch with messengers who will bring you orders and remain nameless. All orders, which you will always receive by word of mouth — any written communication is punishable with death — must be carried out by you in the manner indicated and within the specified time. I may as well tell you at once that your work will be very strenuous, and not exactly pleasant. But you have no alternative but to obey implicitly. Moreover, you will be watched at every turn. Hm! yes . . ."

He stopped and thought a moment. Gioia crouched on his chair, his face all awry and his arms hanging limply at his side, and in spite of the noise of the blood rushing in his ears, he heard the hard clear words.

"Hm! yes," repeated the gentleman with the beard; he had a soft pleasing voice, "just show me your back a moment."

"Back . . ." Gioia repeated mechanically. But he sprang obediently to his feet, getting up so quickly that he knocked

his knee, and, with trembling hands drew his shirt over his head. My God, he thought suddenly, my back is quite round. . . . It is almost like a small hump. . . . If only Checca will refrain from looking! But Checca was peering out of the window.

The gentleman ran a moist finger tip over the Imperial initials, which were itching terribly. But the rubbing was pleasant and all at once Gioia was forced to chuckle.

"Eh?" cried the gentleman, and, leaning forward, he examined his brow. Checca too turned round and looked suspiciously at him. They are beginning to doubt my sanity, thought Gioia.

"It's tickling, that's all," he said by way of excuse. He said it for Checca's sake; and although she turned away again, she certainly heard it.

"I see," said the gentleman, examining his back again, and making sure of the hollows and ridges of the tattooing. "All right," he remarked at last, and seemed well satisfied. "It can easily be managed. Two grazing shots would be enough . . ."

Gioia opened his mouth and raised his arms. The gentleman could not restrain a faint smile.

"Well, now," he exclaimed, "that must, of course, be obliterated. You will simply be shot at. Do you understand? The branded letters will be obliterated by two deep and honourable battle scars. We have a marksman on our strength for jobs like this, a sort of specialist in scars and slight mutilations."

* * * * *

In the early days Gioia's thoughts naturally turned to suicide. But when one particularly black day this thought took practical shape, and his small sharp pen-knife was just about to open the veins in his wrist, Checca was instantly beside him and quickly wresting the little polished implement from him, flung it away murmuring: "No, no!" She said nothing more. She used no hard words. Truth to tell she actually stroked his hair and then kissed him — a little carelessly perhaps, but she

did kiss him. And thus Gioia shouldered the heavy burden of his life, and no longer thought of casting it from him.

And his life was indeed a heavy burden. First of all when he went to the scar specialist, it happened to be one of the latter's bad days, so that, although the Imperial initials were successfully shot away, some important nerve tissue, a piece of his shoulder-blade, and a corner of his right elbow were also removed. For some weeks he lay in bed under the very indifferent treatment of a Portuguese ship's surgeon; but he was well nursed by Checca. Nevertheless when he entered upon his duties, he was a cripple. The gentleman with the beard, however, the all-powerful F.R. seemed quite satisfied with his bodily infirmity, for now he could pass Gioia off as a genuine piece of war wreckage, and according to the purpose he had to serve, declared he had once fought either on this or that side, in the Italian wars. The duties of the mobile executive section, to which Gioia belonged, and whose existence was only made known to him in the form of taciturn strangers who came to him from time to time with orders from F.R., were at once mysterious, perilous and wearing. For the purposes of an obscure power, which he knew nothing about, except that he feared it, he had to make journeys to Paris, Vienna, and all the principal towns of Italy, pronounce incomprehensible catch-words, or even figures, in the presence of certain specified persons; spy upon men and buildings, smuggle arms, explosives and poisons across the frontier, like a weird shadow glide swiftly out of the way of impending horrors and acts of terrorism, and, on two separate occasions, commit murder. Once in Naples he had to kill a Spanish agitator, and at a spot near Parma he had to do away with a man about thirty years of age; though who he was and what he had done, Gioia had not the faintest idea. The uncanny machinery which controlled his movements, and constantly pulled him through the jaws of death unscathed, ultimately attained in his imagination to the dignity of something divine, beside which his own thoughts, his conscience and his soul, simply did not count.

Why should he do this or that, or on two occasions fire his pistol at men who were unsuspectingly turning their backs upon him? Could the end justify such evil means? — To such questions he had become, up to a point, indifferent; for he had come to regard his own person merely as the hand, or the word, or the muscle, of that embodiment of power, F.R., and therefore irresponsible and innocent. Besides, was not Checca, in her way also an instrument like himself? Often enough she even accompanied him on his missions, so that it was impossible for him to become estranged from his sin. But she rarely had to raise the whip of reminder. For did he not do his duty, so that reminder was unnecessary?

But his sick body found it hard to endure the daily suspense and the exertion of constantly travelling hither and thither for over six years. And then he was done. What with attacks of gout, and increasing symptoms of paralysis, he was completely broken and useless and a little bent old man at fifty years of age. F.R. pensioned him off — that is to say, he gave him a harmless little post of spy and messenger in Florence, which cost the Party only a trifle — and provided the beggar Gioia with a pendulum existence between Santa Croce and Santa Maria del Fiore.

That was in 1810. The years that now followed were for him full of a sort of dreary mercy. His sin left him in peace. Checca was occupied in a more active sphere. In connection with the movement for Italian Independence, which ultimately crystallised out of the various revolutionary factions, but had been unable to acquire any definite form under the glare of the Napoleonic sun, peaceful Tuscany, even in those days, did not count for much. The two centres of activity were Piedmont and Naples. Checca spent most of her time in northern Italy. And as at twenty-five her charms were already rapidly fading, she was no longer called upon to serve the objects of the Party as a prostitute, but was retained for her fanaticism. She was now employed, as her father had been before her, in the

capacity of a secret agent. She seldom visited Florence. Gioia, who at first hankered after her, and felt the separation from his fate deeply, almost as if it had been an ordinary parting from some one intimate and beloved — for the human soul in its uttermost depths remains ever innocent — soon accustomed himself to a solitude, which gradually helped his blunted faculties to forget what he most wished to forget. And thus he floated like a piece of rotten wood, mean and yet secure, on the tide of years which was to sweep a demi-god from the face of the civilized world. When history with paltry spite brought the world-upheaval to a full-stop on a point in the Atlantic Ocean, and then proceeded to stimulate the pigmies who remained behind to cut twenty-six long years out of the recent past and to join the year 1816 to the year 1788, the old-new ideas did after all glide with the rest of things into the new-old world. Secret Party groups in Italy perceived their own aims and features ever more and more clearly outlined against the black background of the Restoration. They already saw the great goal towards which they must strive. And this goal was the Future. They therefore became young again, in order to be able to meet that future.

In the year 1820, when secret societies had already been organised in almost every State of Italy, Checca came to Florence, in order to help in the formation of the revolutionary committee of Tuscany. She had not seen Gioia for three years. As she wished to speak to him, she did not look out for him in the streets, but went to see him in his lurking-place, which was known only to herself and the Party. The beggar lived in the Ghetto near the Mercato Vecchio, in a dark and noisome corner, behind a tangled maze of houses, strange courtyards, decayed walls and arches, and intricate alleys, which could afford to scoff at any police raid. Nor was it a retreat he had lighted upon either by accident or thanks to his own perspicacity; he lived there because the Party ordered him to do so. The connection between the secret societies and the Italian Ghettos, was concealed and subterranean, uncanny as the

strongholds of Elend themselves.* But it existed, nevertheless, and it was said that no small amount of the maintenance funds of the Party reached it along the invisible channels of the Ghetto. It was also said that it was chiefly the Jews who were responsible for keeping the sparks of 1789 alive during the years that followed. They associated themselves with every revolutionary movement, because its success necessarily meant emancipation.

Gioia occupied an empty back room behind a slaughterer's premises, a dark recess which led to an open passage, buried in a tangle of crazy alleys, crooked walls, drooping eaves, and endless doors, behind which more strange creatures lived, more alleys twisted and turned, and the nightmare labyrinth of houses continued on and on. But in this windowless room, which always reeked of blood and raw meat, he did no more than sleep. When he was up and awake, and able to remain at home, he stayed in the passage, with its broken flags, sitting on a stool between the door of his room and a grated window which was always dark, set in the wall of the opposite house, staring into the narrow patch of sky above his head. He was a reserved, inaccessible old man, much less humble than when on the streets. He hardly spoke a word, and greeted no one, except his landlord who meant well by him. Moreover he seemed deaf to the noises made by his fellow-men which poured in upon him from every crack in the surrounding walls. People left him alone; they respected him; for they knew who had placed him there.

When he heard the farther door of his room bang behind him, and some one entering the room, he frowned angrily. Surely everybody knew that no one was allowed to enter his room! He did not stir; he did not even turn round. He waited for the intruder to withdraw covered with shame. And yet there the creature stood on the very threshold behind his back.

"What is it . . . ?" he demanded roughly; but at that

* An allusion to Goethe's Walpurgismght Scene in Faust which he staged in Elend.

moment he smelt Checca's scent, for she was always strongly perfumed. And he pivoted round to her on his stool.

"Good morning," she said coldly, "I have something to say to you."

"Oh, Checca!" he said softly, and held out a hand to her. She took it and then, with curious emphasis, added, "I am going to stay here now."

Gioia was silent. His grey lips quivered slightly. Once more he looked up at the patch of sky. Checca in brief and business-like tones told him all the news.

"So you have been restored to active service again," she said in conclusion, "though only within the area of the city. You will take all your orders direct from me."

Gioia did not stir.

"Do you understand?" she enquired. The old man's lips moved. The words "I refuse . . ." caught her ear.

"What . . . ?"

"I refuse . . . I have had enough . . ."

"Daddy!" was all she said, in a deep voice, and looked at him.

* * * * *

It was about this time that Gastro Guerra, a young man of twenty from Livorno, who was studying for the law at the somewhat down-at-heel University of Pisa, began his political career.

THE THUMB

I

A BEGGAR was walking across the Piazza. The deep shadows cut the great quadrangle, bathed in the fierce midday heat, into two unequal patches of black and white. The cafés on the sunny side were empty, in spite of the awnings overhead. On the shady side, however, large numbers of men were standing as usual by the little tables of the Café del Giappone. The beggar, an old man with a grey beard and blue spectacles, was walking unconcernedly away from the square on his bent legs, taking not the slightest trouble to avoid the fierce white heat of the sunny side. His right hand seemed strangely crippled, as was probably the whole of his right arm; for he held it drawn up at a sharp angle, so that his fingers almost touched his shoulder. His huge thumb stood out, projecting like a broken sign-post into the air.

He passed close by the tables on the sunny side, his body swaying from left to right as he walked, as though the ground were rocking beneath him. It was impossible to tell whether his eyes, behind their dark glasses, were on the look-out for almsgivers, or whether they were not simply turned meekly and indifferently towards the ground; for his stiff neck made his head droop so low over his breast, as if it were fastened there in all humility, that his projecting thumb seemed as if it were trying to soar above it, and were making the strange claim to be the rebellious or accusing summit of his wretched person. For the old man never halted, and did not even incline his body towards the people who passed him. His begging was dumb, and full of a certain deference. It took the form of

slightly extending his left hand, which was only partly opened, as if modestly prepared to take alms. But nobody gave him anything, and it did not appear to surprise him in the least. Oddly enough, however, hardly anyone failed to notice him. Among the few customers in the cafés on the sunny side, only two or three did not look up as he shuffled by. The others raised their heads with curiosity, then glanced at one another and frowned. And yet their eyes had looked on the cripple without pity, and seemed to have sought nothing more than his stiff projecting thumb.

When the beggar, coming to the end of the tables on the sunny side, turned round to the right, and, hobbling alongside the houses which, with shutters up, seemed to be sleeping, plunged into the shaded half of the square, one of a group of literary men and students who were brandishing papers and arguing in front of the Café del Giappone, looked up, blinked his eyes and cried out above the hum of voices about him:

"Gioia!"

The rest were immediately silent, and all heads were turned towards the human wreck that was lurching towards them. The man who had just called out — a middle-aged journalist of the Radical persuasion named Scaleterra — then said softly:

"I see now. Don't all look at him! Things have gone so far. I tell you — no, I shan't tell you anything. . . ."

Gioia, the beggar, turned in towards the front of the shaded café, and with his eyes concealed, stood there, a crooked apathetic figure. The group about the journalist could not take their eyes off his projecting thumb, but at a low sharp word from Scaleterra, newspapers were taken up and conversations resumed, though with somewhat unnatural haste. A very fat Abate, who was sitting a little way off at one of the tables nearest the road, and who had remained motionless, as if asleep or buried in thought, began to blink his lashless little eyes, and turned his head quickly, first to the group of arguing students, and then to the cripple who was lurching towards him. Stretching out an arm in a perfectly careless and

friendly manner, and skilfully succeeding in reaching Gioia's upturned palm, he whispered:

"Yours is a hard lot, *amico*. Here's a ha'penny for you."

Gioia halted, looking if possible even more crooked and wizened than when he was moving. For a moment his projecting thumb seemed on the point of shaking or collapsing, so great was his surprise. Even his beard trembled.

"*Dio, Dio!*" muttered the grey lips, and perhaps a word of thanks followed. But the dark-coloured glasses were not turned towards the giver. Then drawing himself up, and bending forward again, he started off once more. His left hand closed convulsively over the ha'penny, which turned out to be a five-franc piece. The Abate took a sip of coffee, and once more became motionless, as if he were sinking into his own vast depths. The group of journalists obediently continued their conversation, bestowing but careless glances at the thumb as it went on its way. Gioia turned into the noisy street which led to the Piazza del Duomo, and quickly thrust his hand with the large coin into his pocket. When the hand reappeared, it was partly opened, and modestly poor as before.

A moment later the party of journalists began to disperse. The men moved off along various streets in a northerly direction in groups of two and three.

The fat Abate also rose from his seat, and looked enormously tall and broad when he stood up. Then pulling his broad brimmed hat over his eyes, he sauntered towards the Duomo, his height enabling him to peep with perfect unconcern down the open necks of the women, who stood before the shops turning their backs to him. At last in the narrow passage between the Duomo and the Campanile he met Gioia, the beggar, who was waiting there for him.

2

Guerra, who was now thirty-one and had already achieved a certain fame, lived in an overcrowded workman's house in

Borgunto near Fiesole. He was a briefless barrister of Livorno, had been a political fugitive from Milan, and had already been for many years a thorn in the flesh of the Austrian and Tuscan police, though what they had against this hot-blooded, eloquent man, who, by the by, was far from communicative, was not very clear. For his political activities were hard to fathom. Possibly the authorities suspected the passionate and mysterious man of uglier and more important activities than the facts justified, or proved. At all events, the Chief of Police in Milan, who was a shrewd fellow, had availed himself of the opportunity afforded by the suppression of a secret society in the 'twenties, to get rid of this strange creature also. He achieved this end in the usual unostentatious way, by one day informing the barrister, through the medium of a personal friend, that he was on the point of being arrested and that he had only forty-eight hours in which to escape from the Kingdom of Lombardy and Venetia. Guerra had a keen appreciation of the gravity of such examples of official indiscretion, and vanished for a while It was said that he worked for two years on the central committee of the Italian Independence Movement in Paris, and that after that he organised secret societies in Piedmont, the Romagna, and the Central Italian States. But nothing was known for certain. Then, in 1828, he suddenly appeared in Tuscany, and settled down in Florence as a barrister. But owing to the fact that the only people to call at his office were various members of the excellent grand-ducal secret service, or because he had perhaps discovered that he was the central figure in a very lively correspondence which was being carried on between Florence, Milan and Vienna, and was drawing to a close, he soon disappeared for the second time. And while the exasperated authorities were connecting him with the signs of unrest which were beginning to appear in Northern Italy, and communicated their suspicions to the various governments concerned, Guerra himself, equipped with a long black beard and the name of Carlo Malossi, was living a few miles away from the city, eagerly prosecuting his labours.

He occupied three small rooms, and also had the use of a narrow balcony which joined the house in which he lived to the one next door. The glowing softness of the Mugnone valley, which lay spread out in rhythmic radiance before his windows, made up for the poverty and meanness of his rooms. An exceptionally pretty girl, about twenty years of age, who said she was his sister, kept house for him, and contrived, by means of her firmness and charm, to keep at bay the curiosity, which in the early days poured in upon the couple from every quarter. And as the slight girl and the broad-shouldered man both had the same blue-black hair, the same severe brow and broad open forehead, and the same piercing eyes, their relationship was never seriously questioned. Moreover, it should be noted that from the very first certain young workmen of the district showed the man the deepest deference, and, as if acting on definite instructions, thought fit not only to put a stop to all gossip, but also to prepossess the inhabitants of Borgunto in favour of the couple. This was not a very difficult task, as the Signore was an exceptionally lovable and kindly man.

Guerra did not go out very often, but sat day after day on the balcony, engaged chiefly in writing; while every night his table lamp burnt in his study, sometimes until dawn. At first he seemed to have a wide circle of friends; for hardly a day passed without a visitor appearing — men on foot, on horseback, and in carriages, who not infrequently arrived when dusk had fallen, and had vanished by the morning. People also noticed a closed travelling-chaise drive up once or twice, which, strange to say, did not come from the direction of Florence, but on the contrary down from the mountains, and out of it a well-dressed lady alighted. But even her visits to the Signore's house did not last very long. And the carriage with the fair occupant inside would drive back along the road to the mountains, in the direction of San Clemente.

Among the inhabitants, there were not a few in those days who found these constant comings and goings but little to

their taste, or regarded them with suspicion. But once again it was the young workmen of the place, supported by one or two well-to-do citizens of Fiesole, who vouched for the harmless and honourable nature of the visitors, and allayed suspicion. Then later on, when, as the result of the events which took place in Paris in July, the storm spread over central and southern Europe, and most urgent instructions were issued by the Government in Vienna to all its Allies, as well as to those Italian States with which it was on friendly terms, even the small police station at Fiesole received orders to keep a stricter watch on strangers and foreigners. Whether these orders concealed certain provisions regarding Signor Malossi in Borgunto and his kaleidoscopic circle of acquaintances, was not revealed. But in any case the flow of visitors certainly ceased all of a sudden — indeed, this happened some days before the promulgation of the decree, though the person of the author Malossi remained unmolested. After that the brother and sister seemed to lead a life of monotonous calm and seclusion, only occasionally interrupted by a long excursion on foot on the part of the girl, whom the Signore only rarely accompanied; and by the visits of an old poorly-clad woman, who for some unknown reason was taken to be the girl's old nurse.

Guerra knew perfectly well how to turn his courteous manner to account, either to conciliate people or to hold them at a distance. He was friendly to every one; always had a kind word or a sympathetic question for his neighbours, but allowed no open curiosity, no familiarity, no prying glances to pierce the firm and polished surface of his polite manner. There was in his eye a certain haughtiness, together with what looked at times uncommonly like evil depths — mild danger signals which made their appearance the moment his interlocutor even so much as thought of an indiscreet question. Thus the more simple among those about him were content to allow the relationship to remain within the limits of these external formalities, pleased and even a little bit flattered to

enjoy the same right as others to the greeting which was never denied them, and always mildly intoxicated by the radiant smile of the Signorina. For she who dwelt, like an ingenious complement to her brother, beside his sombre calm, was sometimes able, if ever the light fell too fiercely on him, to emit such a sunny glow from her features, that people, becoming dazzled, no longer saw him, and no longer even thought of him.

The Signore, moreover, seemed neither to heed nor to turn to account the respect and devotion which, though almost disciplined in its nature, he enjoyed at the hands of the younger men. He cared little more for them than he did for the older people with whom he came into contact. There was only one of these young men who, after the influx of visitors had ceased, occasionally obtained access to his rooms — one Renzo Maddii, an intelligent, somewhat taciturn and reserved young man of five and twenty, who was employed in the offices of the Radical Gazette in Florence. People noticed that from time to time Maddii might be seen sitting on the balcony with Malossi of an evening. But no one could discover whether he visited the place on account of the beautiful girl or her brother, who, apart from this, no one connected in any way with politics.

And yet it was precisely during the months which darkly and fatefully followed upon the events of July in Paris, that the spirit of the ordinary little townspeople was shaken by the dark and menacing character of the political horizon. Rumours of some sort of imminent danger were abroad, danger which was to come from the neighbouring states of the north; and people spoke of the impending explosion of those Jacobin mines which had recently been tried in Paris, and which were now to make the rest of Europe unsafe. This was more or less what people said, even if their private opinion was somewhat different. But everybody was, for very good reasons, convinced of the omniscience of the *Buon Governo* — for such was the nickname of the Florentine Ministry of Police — and of the ubiquity of its secret agents, and no one was prepared to risk

his personal freedom. Moreover, thanks to its extremely able ruler and a government which in its foreign policy was very elastic, the Grand Duchy was one of the few States in the Peninsula in which rebellion did not simmer below the surface. People had grown accustomed to the somewhat pedagogic rule; they were quite amenable, and allowed themselves to be stroked by the hand that had placed the birch-rod in the corner. Aye, they already loved that hand. Was it not fatherly, even when it lay hold of anybody? Why should they get rid of it for the sake of an idea, which, even if it did not kill, at least bewildered, and in the end handed the victim back to the same old firm hand? Thus thought the old folk, who had seen the tree of liberty rise up and collapse on the Piazza del Granduca, and had witnessed the whole ironic cycle of history from the commissioners of the French National Convention, to the comic opera Bourbon Knights of Parma, and the minions of Napoleon and Metternich, all pressed into the space of fifteen years, only to end in their present grand-ducal paterfamilias. As far as it was safe to do so, these people said what they thought. Meanwhile the younger people held their peace, perhaps because they thought otherwise — or did not think at all.

Even the author Malossi wasted no words on the state of affairs. And Borgunto called him *poeta,* because it thought that behind his silence there must lie rejected verses — fine, sonorous, though somewhat useless things, which had little bearing upon everyday occurrences, and none whatever on sensational current events.

But on the morning of that blazing autumn day on which Gioia's thumb floated across the Piazza, the Signore uttered the same words as the politician Scaleterra. A moment after old Checca, who was believed to be the girl's old nurse, had taken her leave after a short visit, and had vanished down the steep road to Fiesole, he remarked to his sister:

"Yes, Madda, things have gone so far."

He raised his brows and was just about to smile in the pleas-

ant, care-free manner which became him so well; but it was as if his dark thoughts were sealing his mouth. Thus his lips moved only slightly, which was not very reassuring. Maddalena looked at him.

"Do you think it will succeed?" she enquired. In a trice Guerra's face was covered with tiny wrinkles. He looked old and worn out by life. His chin was brutal and stubborn.

"It will succeed some day," he said. "The most important thing is not to dread repeating the experiment. There are hundreds of beginnings and only one end."

3

Only old Checca knew where Gioia slept, and where he was to be found during the day. She alone knew the phases of his visible and invisible existence, and she alone could influence it up to a point. She was much younger than her white hair and her withered skin seemed to indicate. She was now thirty-five, and he was probably over seventy. Her hard life possibly accounted for the fact that she had become an old woman so soon; or was it perhaps the strange will within her to appear as old as Gioia and to offer as small a contrast as possible to his time-worn and decrepit appearance? For she never acknowledged herself as his daughter. She allowed people to infer that she was either his wife, his sister, or a former mistress — that is to say, if they were at all interested in her relationship to him. For twenty years the beggar had been seen wandering to and fro between Santa Croce and Santa Maria del Fiori, growing ever more crooked and drab as the years went by. People remembered his name, because the fact that it had pleased the Almighty to call the poor devil Gioia — Benedetto Gioia — puzzled them, or caused them to pause and reflect. What he could have been twenty years previously, nobody knew; for he had very little to say, and never spoke about himself. Even the silent old man's actual presence told them very little, no more, that is to say, than they saw — a

staggering form on the streets, a crippled hand, which at times appeared stiff, and that conspicuous humility which, while it distinguished him from other beggars, would have made his life seem an enigma, if people had allowed their thoughts to dwell on it. For with it all, Gioia never looked famished, but, on the contrary, was always plump and portly; and although his clothes were worn and poor, they were never in rags, and at times even appeared to be patched and mended with fresh though not actually new material. Nevertheless, up to the present the authorities had not discovered any grounds for interfering with him. The reserve which was the outcome of both his nature and his calling never allowed him to come into conflict with the police, and never yet had anyone seen him drunk or in the company of such doubtful characters as spend their nights under bridges or on park benches, and whose infirmities are only visible when an appeal can be made to the eye of pity.

Meanwhile Gioia and his daughter were not often seen together in public; for Checca was not a beggar, but a worker in straw, and occupied a clean and pleasant room in the workpeople's quarter near the Porta Romana. She frequently hawked her hats and baskets round the houses, and every week had a stand in the Mercato Vecchio. And there, if not many people were about, the old man would join her, at about midday or in the evening after vespers. He only remained with her a moment, exchanged a few simple words, and was clearly the more humble of the two in his bearing. On other days their meetings in the streets, which had been somewhat more frequent of late, gave the impression of being quite fleeting and accidental, a mere halt for a brief interchange of words. The blue spectacles were not raised a hair's breadth, and Checca, who as a rule had more to say than he had, observed the passers-by meanwhile with her restless eyes; and then they would separate without so much as a "good-bye." He never went to see her at her room, possibly because it was a matter of principle with him not to leave his familiar beat.

But Checca, who occasionally only reached home at a very late hour, might well have been spending her time at the old man's unknown retreat.

On that autumn morning, when the sky, almost melancholy in its blueness, hung torpidly over the gold brown and deep green of the landscape, and the distant dome of the cathedral seemed to throb under the weight of the world's serenity, she descended the steep road to San Domenico. Her mission with all that it meant in suspense and responsibility lay behind her, urging her to stride with long, brisk, youthful and certain steps over the round, treacherous, sloping cobbles of the Strada Fiesolana, and not to look at anything, except the best places on which to set her hurrying feet. Her yellow face, beneath the wild luxuriance of her white hair, betrayed only the sternness of her ruling thought, and nothing of the strenuous journey or the heat of the sun, which was already beginning to burn. When she reached the Dominican monastery at the foot of the hill, her parchment skin was still as colourless and dry as it had been a quarter of an hour previously up in the breezy market place of Fiesole. Before the excise office a peasant was waiting with his cart full of empty straw-covered bottles.

"Hurry up, Carlino," said Checca, taking her place beside the fat little man. "I'll give you twenty soldi if you drive quickly."

Gioia was lurching slowly along the Lungarno between the Ponte alle Grazie and the Ponte Vecchio, his crippled right arm terminating in a clenched fist. Checca was coming from Por Santa Maria, her face fierce and yellow with zeal, her eyes glancing from one to the other of the people she passed, insignificant, impudent people, many, too many, of them too, and every one capable of proving dangerous. Gioia, who was waiting, rocking from side to side, under the portico of the Uffizi Gallery, saw her; indeed, he saw everything without looking. His head dropped lower than ever over his breast, and propelling himself with a jerk of his shoulders over to the other side, he leant against the breastwork and spat into the

sluggish yellow waters of the Arno. Checca was already at his back, muttering the few important words she had to tell him, after the manner of a treasure that has to be buried, and which once buried brings both relief and uneasiness.

"*Dio! Dio!*" murmured Gioia without turning round. But Checca did not move away.

"Take care! Do you hear, you old robber? Otherwise they will pay you out!"

Only then did she go. The old man moved in the opposite direction, and when he turned into the portico of the Uffizi, he was the same as ever. But when he had gone a few paces further and had reached the shade of the colonnade, his right hand shook violently and his right arm twitched up to the shoulder. Then the gigantic thumb rose aloft and he went on his way.

. . . . .

But Checca, armed with her responsibility and her suspicions, could not have been far away, as the beckoning hand moved onwards. Oh, Checca was terrible and inexorable! She was more than a menace, she was a scourge! The space between the Duomo and the Campanile was not narrow enough, and the fat Abate was not tall and broad enough. Gioia's grey lips began to quiver and he could not utter a word.

"Fellow, have you been struck dumb!" snorted the Abate. Gioia, leaning forward a little, lurched under the giant's arm to the other side and made for the rear of the cathedral. Taken aback for a moment, the man of God nevertheless found time to press a second coin into the beggar's half-open palm from behind. But the old man allowed it to fall without altering his pace, and was soon out of the shadow of the tower and standing in the sunshine. The Abate, who could not run after him in full view of the crowd, picked up the coin with a curse, and disappeared in the direction of the Battistero.

Checca, who was watching close by from a door of the cathedral, soon caught the old man up. Gioia shrank back humbly and halted.

"What did Don Lionello want?" she asked in a perfectly friendly way.

"Nothing," he replied indistinctly, turning away in wrath. She was silent for a moment, then stooping to whisper in his ear, she blinked.

"Listen," she hissed through her teeth, and her voice sounded menacing. Gioia swayed from side to side. She hesitated a moment, and then merely added: *"Babbo,"* which is equivalent to our "Daddy!" But the old man seemed unable to endure the word. It was as if in his anxiety it had been the very word he was most dreading to hear, and the hand he held out for alms shook in a paroxysm of pain and surrender.

"Stop it!" he implored, and then with a deep groan, he added: *"Santa Madonna!"*

Checca seemed to have forgotten every form of menace. She drew herself up and looked watchfully round. Then she said very softly:

"Don Lionello is not one of them. If I remember rightly he is actually on the black list. Well . . . ?"

Gioia was obedient. And without any circumlocution he replied:

"He asked me whether I knew who Scaleterra was."

When the old man spoke a whole sentence, there was a strange incongruity between his harsh wailing voice, and his almost cultivated language, free from any sign of dialect, and even of the Tuscan gutterals. Checca looked concerned.

"Well, and what else?" she demanded impatiently. "Of course you said No."

"I said No. And he called me an old rogue. Then he asked me whether I knew whom people meant when they spoke about the Princess. I tried to appear as stupid as possible and replied, 'Surely, the Grand Duchess.' He laughed and said that I pleased him, and asked whether I wanted to earn a lot of money."

Checca interrupted him sharply:

"Did he ask you about *him?*"

"No," replied Gioia, "he didn't get as far as that. I saw you and came away."

"And what if you hadn't seen me?"

The old man grew stubborn once more.

"*Dio!*" he muttered, "but I did see you . . ."

"*Babbo,*" she said cruelly, blinking her eyes, "I shall report you."

Whereupon he lurched forward on his way, almost without effort. She kept pace with him.

"But what have I said?" he exclaimed plaintively. "Do leave me alone, Checca; I have said nothing. And I shan't say anything either."

"But I am frightened all the same!"

And she let him go.

4

In the Palazzo Vecchio, the headquarters of the Government, there reigned that ill-concealed though courteous nervousness which betokened not only a political crisis, but also the ill-humour of the Prime Minister. Old Marchese del Monte did not like any definite display of emotion, either in himself or his officials, or in politics, which, with the diplomatic mastery of the eighteenth century, he had conducted under the most varied forms for the last thirty years. When, fifteen years previously, the last upheaval that had shaken his Cabinet had occurred — the news that on the evening of February the 26th the Emperor with Generals Bertrand and Drouot had left the port of Portoferraio in the brig *l'Inconstant* — his finely pointed pencil had snapped. That was all! All other vibrations of the political edifice he merely registered, according to their violence, by a softening of his soft senile voice, by a sharpening of his dangerous dialectic or his polished irony, and by a more pronounced contempt of men in general and of his staff in particular. In regard to the latter this was shown only by a faint impatience in listening to what they had

to say, an unexpected cutting short of their words, and an ungraciousness of manner which was indicated even in the irritable movements of his small fingers, all of which manifestations were the more distressing, seeing that his outward rigidity of bearing precluded anything in the way of a guess as to the cause and duration of the perturbing factor. And the Chief had imparted his character in the most extraordinary way to the Palace occupied by the Government, from the private rooms of the dignitaries to the offices of the most insignificant clerks. It could not be shaken, as it was always courteous, gentle, mysterious and caustic. Without any difficulty whatsoever it could, either by means of the concealed offensiveness of its officials or by the faintest and most provoking of elaborations in its archaic jargon, reproduce to a nicety every passing mood of its Chief as also of the political horizon. The great man's spirit and system had permeated its very walls, although no change had been observed either in their consistency or durability.

But this time the veiled exasperation of the Palace and its Chief had lasted months, ever since the happenings in Paris in fact. The long absence of the Grand Duke had been a tactical mistake, not, however, owing to the weight of responsibilities, which was thus piled on to the shoulders of del Monte, his representative, for the old statesman was accustomed to standing alone. The visit of the Grand-ducal family to Germany, which was undertaken, according to programme, shortly after the July Revolution, and owing to the sovereign's conventionality had been neither postponed nor curtailed, looked rather like flight. Not only had Vienna been displeased and expressed her displeasure, but the whole of unsettled Europe had started rubbing her eyes, and began to peer curiously and clear-sightedly into the faces of her princes. For the Italian States above all, which were undermined and easily led by the force of personality, was it unwise to pay no heed to the criticism of the rest of the world, and at times del Monte could no longer understand his master. The Grand

Duke was one of the few men whom he respected and in his way even loved. The young man had been a most worthy pupil and disciple, whereupon, in an almost too sudden spurt of development, he had discovered his own strength and known how to get it recognised. When the ruler had set himself on the throne for the second time, as it were, his minister was secretly afraid. He soon perceived, however, that the prince's head had in no way been raised to oppose him, but, with a full consciousness of tradition and his calling as autocrat and supreme authority, far from curtailing the powers of his minister, he had actually complemented them in the grandest manner. Del Monte, the courtier of the eighteenth century, the dynastic councillor, free from all personal ambition, did not take umbrage at such careless and confident claims of sovereignty, but in his heart of hearts was delighted by them. In a trice his sceptical mind saw that his life had been given its proper meaning once more. The hateful era of upstarts and usurpers seemed to be at an end, and the blinding confusion of the early years of the century to be clearing up. Del Monte was happy to be able to feel for his Prince the respectful attachment which befitted him. Acts of self will on the sovereign's part, extremes, whether of tyranny or of sudden leniency, could now easily be made good. The faithful servant of a perfect ruler could concede or meekly bear much to which the mentor of a crowned nonentity would have been called upon to offer the most energetic resistance. Thus del Monte calmly agreed to the Grand Duke's journey, for the latter was far from being a coward, and cared nothing about false interpretations; and the minister undertook to make the best of the consequences. The humble suggestion which he was at the moment unable to keep to himself, to the effect that others might see something more than accident in the curious coincidence of His Highness's journey with the events in Paris, and that it might be connected by them with certain ideas, was answered merely by a wrinkling of the pale and haughty brow and, a moment later, by the question:

"Am I in the habit of modifying my conduct on account of such considerations, your Excellency?"

Meanwhile, the effect of the Paris explosion on southern Europe in the height of the summer could not be foreseen, though no trace of it could be detected. On the surface everything still remained calm, and any unusual stir there might be was wholly confined to the police headquarters of the various States, which, as a result of warnings received from the Central Bureau in Vienna, to which they were either subordinate or else merely friendly, were in a state of feverish excitement. For although the volcano was only rumbling underground, it was certainly on the point of eruption. Each State either heard the rumblings near at hand, or else beyond the border, which in any case was never very far away. Men might reasonably feel nervous. The ears of the various governments had not yet forgotten the sinister uproar, which had spread from Piedmont and Naples only a few years previously. Even Tuscany, the most solidly constructed of all the States, whose secure position a clever administration had proved to the outside world during the last decade, by a number of engagingly humane gestures — by offering refuge to illustrious though harmless fugitives from the south, and by kindly tolerating a few intelligent journals — even the Grand Duchy became uneasy. And del Monte, yielding to the importunities of his extremely zealous Chief of Police, allowed some of the least famous and least dangerous emigrants to be removed to San Marino. Nevertheless he took care that this should be done as unobtrusively as possible, and secured the good reputation of his enlightened State by publishing written statements on the part of those who had been apprehended, to the effect that their change of address had been necessitated entirely by considerations of health.

The Chief of Police, or the President of the *Buon Governo,* as he was officially called, regarded such precautions as ludicrous. He certainly did not express this view to the Head of the Government, with whom at this time he had daily con-

ferences; but it could be read quite plainly in his eyes, and the Marchese was not easily deceived. The Chief of Police was a new man, only recently appointed; his name was Pompeo Caminer. He was a Venetian, and had formerly been an Austrian official of infamous repute — that is to say, Chief of the famous Detective Bureau of Milan. For some reason or other the Lombard Government wished to get rid of him, and dispatched him to Tuscany, where a person of his rabid tendencies seemed to be required. He stepped into the shoes of the late Chief, who had been a great society man and a famous art-collector, but not an ideal Police official, hobnobbing as he did with his prisoners and discussing æsthetics and Voltaire with them. Del Monte engaged Caminer because he knew how badly the police organisation stood in need of reform, and because his shrewd judgment told him that the immediate future might render a good weapon necessary. He chose the man, although the Grand Duke had taken a strong dislike to him, although he himself feared that Caminer might strike a coarse jarring note in the gentle harmony of Government House, and also despite the fact that with all his knowledge of human nature, he had been unable to decide whether the Venetian was a great rogue or merely a great criminologist. He had devised a special method for dealing with him, which was based upon a sort of terrible courtesy, a complete disdain for the man as a man, and an ironic recognition of his gifts; and in addressing him he, as it were, put gloves on his words, so as not to soil his own spirit. Pompeo Caminer, a portly man of forty, had ruddy fair hair, beard, eyebrows and skin of the same colour, and eyes, forsooth, to match! With the brutal radiance of his countenance he seemed to dispel the old man's aversion as the sun obliterates the moon. He appeared to notice nothing, and was fundamentally insensitive. The Head of the Government, whom he sometimes provoked almost to rudeness, longed to be able to believe that he was merely stupid. But the old statesman was much too intelligent to do so and, moreover, he was still far too little inclined to take things easily.

Del Monte seldom opened his eyes quite wide, and even more seldom did he open his lips, beyond a tiny little slit beside his eternal cigarette, which he took from his mouth only when speaking to the Grand Duke, or to ladies, or when he was pronouncing some solemn oration. Now, of course, he kept it in the corner of his mouth, and allowed his haughty eyes to wander through their white lashes over Pompeo Caminer, who with his stumpy legs and broad hips, stood opposite him, mercifully held at a distance by the mighty breadth of the writing table. In spite of the high office the man held, del Monte never invited the Chief of Police to be seated, no matter how long their conference might happen to last. But Caminer was quite content to stand, his stumpy legs making it no hardship to him. He always had a great deal to say, and spoke in a loud emphatic tone of voice. With his strange crude Venetian dialect, he so clipped his words and jumbled his sentences that he was able to convey an enormous amount in very little time. "Even his speech is also ruddily fair," del Monte thought, and, twisting his pencil about his fingers, he blinked at the blue smoke of his cigarette.

Suddenly Caminer stopped talking. Del Monte was by no means clear on what rhetorical figure the official had thus brought his discourse to such an abrupt conclusion, for, during the last few minutes he had not been listening very attentively. "How splendid it would be," he thought, "if the man had noticed my lack of attention and had taken offence!" But another glance at the fellow soon informed him that such expectations were foolish. His report ended, Caminer with gleaming eyes was looking at him, full of righteous attention. He was glowing with that dual serenity of body and occupation, which always caused the Marchese to feel faintly nauseated. The old man softly puffed a thin column of smoke from his lips. He was in no hurry to reply. The narrow mask of his noble face now turned to confront the official — or rather not exactly him but the point of the compass at which he approximately stood.

"Good Cavaliere!" he said at last. "That is all very well, and even if it may not all prove to be true, your information is extraordinarily interesting." Then tapping the table gently with his pencil, he said even more gently: "But, Cavaliere, you will allow me to call your attention to the fact that the State must not only take precautions, it must also respect certain forms. In other words, to cut a long story short, could you not contrive, even at the cost of some effort, to leave Princess Corleone out of the matter altogether?"

Caminer was astonished.

"How could I possibly do so, your Excellency, after having ventured to tell you that the Princess is one of the *Carbonari,* a revolutionary, and a very active one to boot, and that she is certainly in touch with the agitators in Bologna, Parma, and Modena — aye, she may even be the leader of the Tuscan Executive Committee which we have not yet been able to trace."

Del Monte was a little bit shaken, and stroked his chin with his fingers.

"The heads of Criminal Investigation Offices," he rejoined in a not unfriendly manner, "are wont to make daring statements. You are therefore entitled to do so. Moreover, I do not wish to deny that there may be something in all you say. But, Cavaliere, the Princess is not only one of the most prominent figures in Tuscan society, but she is also the wife of a Pretender to a foreign throne. For although we may not recognise him as such politically, we do so socially, and he enjoys our hospitality. She is therefore exterritorial."

Caminer's eyes were aflame with astonishment.

"I see not the smallest grounds why that should prevent any action on the part of the police, your Excellency."

"Oh, indeed?" said the old man, spreading out his thin fingers and smiling faintly. "Very well," he added, after a short, malicious pause, "that's a matter of opinion — not to say of morality. I unquestionably concede to the *Buon Gov-*

erno the technical necessity of not burdening itself with such scruples; but on the other hand you must leave me the right, in cases which stand above the ordinary technique, and I presume to be the judge of such cases — you must allow me and my position in the Government also to have a point of view on the matter. Isn't that so, sir? I must observe certain conventional human forms."

Caminer was silent and raised a shoulder ever so slightly. With an ostentatious turn of his wrist, the old minister flung his cigarette into a bronze bowl filled with water. For every other official in the building this gesture would have been sufficient notification that he was to retire as quickly as he decently could and announce a trying day to the rest of the staff. But Pompeo Caminer did not stir; his energetic legs stood fast and firm. Del Monte had already placed another cigarette in his mouth. The white line of his eyebrows had risen slightly.

"And moreover," he said, and, his lips remaining closed, his words seemed to be forcing their way through his cigarette, "moreover, the Princess enjoys the very special favour of our Sovereign Lord. In fact, in case you should not already be aware of the fact, let me tell you that her friendly relationship to him is neither secret nor yet entirely unknown. You will have the goodness to take this fact into account, Signor Caminer. And now I think we can let the subject drop for the present."

But the Chief of Police did not move. Slowly del Monte straightened himself, and raised his head. Then he opened his eyes — clear, blue, indignant eyes.

"Well?" he enquired sharply. With an unpleasant smile, Caminer rejoined:

"I know how to appreciate your Excellency's orders. But I also know from experience that there have been cases when circumstances have demanded measures of State to be taken even against the wives of highly placed persons. The immense power of the Holy Inquisition — if I may be allowed to refer

to this example, your Excellency — lay in its freedom of action, with which even the Pope could not interfere."

For the fraction of a second the old minister experienced the unfamiliar feeling of fear, like a little stab in his heart. With an unconscious movement of his hand, he shielded his eyes, keeping the fiery countenance of his companion in view notwithstanding.

"Well, what do you wish to do then, my dear sir?" he enquired in a voice somewhat louder than usual. "Do you wish to subject the Princess to examination under torture? But allow me to remind you that in this country torture has been abolished for sixty years."

"You are joking, your Excellency," said Caminer with a smile. "What I want to know is, where is Guerra? And I shrewdly suspect that the Princess knows very well where he is . . ."

Del Monte raised his pencil to his eyes, from which he had hastily removed his hand, and examined its long sharp point.

"What will you say next?" he muttered, emitting a somewhat shaky spiral of smoke. "By the by, Cavaliere, do you write novels in secret?"

Caminer's laugh was so indecently loud, that del Monte gave one or two sharp raps on the table exclaiming:

"Excuse me, sir, you are in the Prime Minister's room."

The Chief of Police bit his lip, and his gravity was restored.

"I beg your Excellency's pardon."

"Granted," replied the old man. "But our interview must now end. I have no doubt that the Chief Justice is already waiting for me. It seems to me that your ideas about the Princess are for the moment based upon suspicions which strike me as more daring than proven. Is that not so?"

"If that is how your Excellency likes to put it — yes."

"Very well! I have given you certain reasons for acting with caution, and you have understood. What do you propose to do now?"

"In the first place, keep watch — naturally without being indiscreet, and follow up certain threads — "

"That's right, Cavaliere, you keep watch, you keep watch. In the name of God and the Police, *addio!*"

At last Caminer left. At the foot of the stairs he found the fat Abbot, wandering up and down extremely bored. As soon as the latter saw him, he accompanied him to the waiting carriage, whispering and gesticulating as he went.

For a moment or two del Monte stared at the spot which the flaming red man had just vacated. His brow, which, with its fine veins, was still surprisingly smooth, was now deeply furrowed. When Professor Mascagni, the Chief Justice, one of the oldest members of the Government, and the Prime Minister's only confidant, entered, del Monte welcomed him with the question:

"Can you guess, Commendatore, who it is that has just given my seventy years a perfectly new sensation?"

The jurist, who had known the old minister fifteen years, was surprised to catch a new note in his voice and, resisting the temptation to answer with a joke, he remained silent.

"Our ruddy gaol-keeper," del Monte replied gravely of his own accord, after a moment's silence.

"Caminer was too much even for the well-trained gentlemen of Milan," said the other, pulling at his thick grey whiskers. "You remember that I warned you, your Excellency?"

Del Monte did not seem to have heard the question. He appeared not to have been interrupted.

"And do you know what sort of feeling it was, Mascagni? It was fear, veritable fear of the rage, of the bad blood, and above all of everything red in that hunter of men, and in the times that are at hand, and which belong to him. *Amico,* I am a grey old man."

5

Maria, Princess Corleone, Countess Labia, made her servants address her as "Your Majesty," because her husband, the senile Prince George, the last descendant of a long overthrown dynasty, was not content with being regarded as the ruling *bon viveur* of Roman and Florentine society, but insisted on advancing his claims to the throne of a certain northern kingdom, and because his servants, and quite recently his club acquaintances also, addressed him as "Sire." The Princess, an extremely proud and beautiful Neapolitan aristocrat, did not live with her husband, nor was she separated from him, but enjoyed a curious and perfectly friendly relationship with him, which was not at all uncommon at the time. She was thirty, the Prince was sixty. She had been married eight years, and throughout that period had been known as the friend of the Grand Duke. In view of this state of affairs, the haughty members of Florentine society condescended to address her officially as Her Highness, and only between themselves did they scoff at her fictitious royalty, which made her feel it incumbent upon her only to return visits from crowned heads or their representatives. The position the Princess held thus meant for her princely husband a sort of acknowledgment of half his claims as Pretender, and acted as a spur continually urging him to prove the other half, little though, in his heart of hearts, he believed in its genuineness. For Maria Corleone was very rich, and he was penniless. And, as she felt but little affection and even less respect for him, she held the purse strings tight. She had rewarded him fairly handsomely for his fictitious crown, which appeared on her linen, her notepaper, and above the throne-like easy chair in her drawing-room, by paying all his debts up to the time of their marriage. Ever since that day, she had provided him with free board and lodging in her palaces in Rome and Florence, and with pocket money not exceeding one hundred ducats a month. But even supplemented by the large sums he used to win at cards,

and the contributions which his stubborn importunacy managed occasionally to extort from the northern kingdom in question, or from admirers of his name who had been caught in his toils, he was yet unable to live as befitted a *grand seigneur*. Hence it came about that the credit which as a royal personage he regarded as his due, and which, strange to say, he was always given, became the mainstay of his life. He lived on his debts, which incidentally seemed to weigh no more heavily upon him than the thought of paying them weighed upon the Princess.

The Grand Duke loved the Princess with the faithful constancy which characterised all his emotions. And the Grand Duchess knew it. She was a peevish, sickly woman who, amid the formalities of existence had not yet found any reason to worry over or to take offence at the relationship. Moreover, the Grand Duke's unfailing tact, and the presence of mind of the Princess, contrived to spare their connection the crude publicity of the usual bond between monarch and *maîtress en titre*. The Grand Duke's love for the lady had sprung from two sentiments which did not often move him — the one was pity, and, strange to say, the other was shame. Her father, Prince Corleone, who had died since the two first met, had been one of the few members of the high Neapolitan nobility who were anti-Bourbon, and who as Liberals were compromised by the military revolution of the Carbonari. When he had fled to Florence with his young daughter to escape the horrors of the reactionary measures of 1821, he was almost destitute of means and quite unable to cope with the unfamiliar hardships of his reduced circumstances; and the drama of the beautiful maiden's life stirred the whole town. The girl's lover, — a poet and a fanatical Carbonaro, who was on the staff of the revolutionary general, — in his desire not to be separated from her, had had the temerity to remain in the city after the return of the Bourbons and the entry of the Austrian army. He was recognised by the spies of the Bloody Duke, the reactionary Minister of Police, Canosa, and

arrested. He was then stripped to the waist, painted back and front with the Carbonari colours which were black, red and blue, placed astride a donkey, bound fast to the saddle, and whipped through the crowded Via Toledo. The thongs of the whips were studded with spikes. Behind the bleeding body on the donkey staggered the other victim — a fainting girl with a black, red and blue sash about her waist, to make her look ridiculous, supported on either side by Austrian soldiers with fixed bayonets. It was the Contessa Maria, who had been betrayed by her maid and sentenced to witness the slow execution of her lover. On reaching the Theatro San Carlo, the executioner's men were already flaying a corpse. The roll of the drums ceased, and the Countess Labia came to her senses some time later in a Francisan convent outside the town. Such was the drama of the young Countess Corleone, who recovered surprisingly quickly from the nervous breakdown which followed her ordeal. The Grand Duke, deeply stirred by what had happened, asked to see her. She wrote to him saying: "Your Highness, I hate Austria. Do you wish to see me notwithstanding?" The Prince went in person to the French Embassy, where she and her father had been allowed to take refuge, and, looking at her with his large, clear and steady eyes, he kissed her hand.

"I will endeavour, Contessina," he said simply, "to make up for all the terrible things that have befallen you." He bade her appear at Court no more, and she did not see him again; but he was working for her with great zeal all the time. He managed to prevail upon the Cabinet in Vienna to send certain orders to Naples, and succeeded in getting the old Prince solemnly rehabilitated and reinstated in all his honours and estates. He also prevailed upon the Austrian Ambassador to call on the Contessina and in the name of his Emperor to apologise for the part played by the Austrian army in the shameful execution, to inform her that judicial proceedings were being taken against the commanding officers responsible, and to declare himself ready to compensate her for what she

had suffered in any way she chose. The Contessina thanked him with dignity, but declined any further compensation. But she never returned to Naples. Her father died and the Grand Duke contrived to secure her succession to the title, name and property. The young Princess immediately disposed of the bulk of her Neapolitan estates, and bought others in Tuscany. She acquired the magnificent palace on the right bank of the Arno, close to the Ponte Santa Trinità, an important country residence between Fiesole and Settignano, and one or two other estates. When the Grand Duke, whose love had been fanned into passion by her extraordinary reserve, found that she had settled down in his State, he assisted her in every possible way, and offered her a Marquisate. This, however, she declined. Then suddenly she married the Pretender, that *roué* well known to Florentine society, who was little loved by the Government, because he frequently seemed to take a delight in bringing about complications with the great northern power in question. The Grand Duke, whose attitude towards the degenerate creature was one of boundless contempt, was staggered. When the newly married couple presented themselves in the Palazzo Pitti, the Duke's courtiers declared they had never seen him look so wretched. A few days later, the Princess, who for some complicated reasons connected with the dynastic succession, had retained her own name and rank, asked for a private audience. The sovereign had never forgotten that interview. It proved to be one of the rare occasions in his life when his self-possession had forsaken him. He, a Prince of thirty-five years of age, famous for the dignity of his bearing, had on that occasion been as ill at ease as one of his young lieutenants might have been, if at the end of his day's duty he had seen the engaging vision of a beautiful woman behind a slowly lifting veil. An hour before the appointed time, he was already in the library, whither he had given orders that she should be conducted. But he cast not a glance at the serene radiance of the Boboli Gardens, whose rhythmic spell stealing through the large windows used

daily to rejoice his musical and order-loving soul. Neither did he vouchsafe a look at the books about him, at once grave and generously ready to help, in their solemn array of shelves which he knew from top to bottom. He gazed only at the clock. She arrived punctually looking extremely lovely — so lovely that she did not disappoint the exorbitant glory of his expectation. He could not remain seated; he could not remain the sovereign; but running to meet her kissed her hands.

"You are surprised, your Highness. You are surprised at my marriage?"

"I do not deny it, Princess!"

"You disapprove of my marriage, your Highness?"

"I have no right to do that."

"But you *have* got the right, your Highness!"

* * * * *

"I cannot say that your marriage pleases me, Maria."

"I might have spared you that, your Highness. But after all I ask myself, why not?"

"That question I shall not answer, Principessa."

"Then I will answer it for you, your Highness, and for myself as well. You are the most remarkable man I know, and Prince George is the most ludicrous."

Then came the first pause in the conversation. But it was not one of embarrassment, not a second of it weighed heavily on their heads. It was merely a moment in which their words recoiled from their deepest meaning and became silent. He looked at her. Her eyes, slightly almond-shaped, had irises of shimmering gold, a sort of gold full of yellow lights. Her lashes were so long that her eyes seemed to be continually changing. They were lascivious eyes. The Prince pursed his lips. But it was he who was the first to speak again.

"So you have political ambitions, Princess?"

"Possibly."

"Might — might I not have been able to realise them for you, up to a point?"

"No, your Highness — that is to say, not before my marriage . . ."

The Grand Duke raised his head sharply.

"Princess, I do not understand you. Can you be more explicit?"

"Certainly, your Highness, that is precisely why I came."

But once again they were silent, and this silence hurt the Prince. Pressing the palms of his hands together, he bowed his head. The Countess looked at his brow, which was broad and showed great capacity for resistance.

"Yes," she said softly, "if you could possibly see your way, through your influence in Vienna, to induce the Holy Alliance at least to discuss the Prince's claims to the throne — "

The Grand Duke revealed a thin strip of teeth, as if he were about to smile. But as he remained quite grave, the movement of his lips made it appear as if he were overcoming some exquisite pang. He answered immediately:

"No, Princess. That is impossible!"

The lady looked down at her hands.

"It is impossible," she said softly, "even if through your efforts you lay me under such an obligation to you that I shall be able to refuse you nothing?"

The Prince stepped back a pace, and then came the third pause, which sent the young woman's blood surging to her cheeks and brow, and forced tears into her eyes. But in a moment he spoke again:

"I love you very much indeed, Maria. I cannot bear to see you even threatened with anything unbecoming. So I have not heard what you said just now."

Then she drew up to him — aye, and it was a body quivering with fear which, all of a sudden, fell into his arms, as if thrust forward by some invisible hand. And she kissed him.

And thus the bond between them was forged, demanding from neither a degree of passion which was likely in any way to offend against important external forms and conventions. The Grand Duke knew that his love was the greater. He knew

perhaps a good deal more; but he said nothing. The Countess Corleone seemed to be content with the social advantages which the ruler's attachment secured, and with one or two prerogatives, which, as was only fair, were granted to a pretended royalty that was now recognised, because the Grand Duke acquiesced in it, and which thus saved the Pretender from political bankruptcy. Apparently she did not ask for anything more. The mad notion of founding a legitimate dynasty seemed to have been a foolish whim of her youth. She was no more suspected of having political interests, than were the rest of the society women in the prosecution of their love intrigues, for her relationship to the sovereign was regarded as just as legal as a marriage, and her princely husband, who at about this time was already forsaking his ballet girls in order to devote himself to absinthe, simply did not count. To the scandal-loving world, Maria Corleone remained an absorbing topic of discussion.

She was in the habit of spending the hot summer months at her luxurious summer resort, which was only a few hundred yards from the Convent of San Majano — on those fairylike hills north of the capital, beyond which, in ever loftier waves and peaks, the mountains gently rise. The house, which in structure resembled a fortress, stood in the centre of a large, strange and silent park, consisting of a sort of tableland on the summit of the hill. The whole property was surrounded by an exceptionally thick, high wall, which stubbornly rose and fell with the unevennesses of the ground.

This year, the Princess, as was her wont, had again withdrawn to this retreat about the middle of May. She was already in her summer quarters, therefore, when the July Revolution broke out and the Grand Duke started on his journey north. Despite his deep attachment to her, the sovereign had never once — not even in the early years of their friendship — abandoned or curtailed his somewhat frequent visits abroad. Maybe this was due to his almost pedantic sense of duty — for his visits to Vienna were chiefly made for political reasons — or

possibly with the object of ridding his friend of his presence for a while. His travels usually took place in the summer months, and to some extent at least solved the problem which every year agitated the minds of high society, as to where he met Maria Corleone, when she was staying at her summer residence. For if, at about this time, the Grand Duke happened to be in the country, society might have replied to this important question by assuming that the couple met at the little Medici villa beyond Settignano, where the Grand Duke used occasionally to stay if only for a few days.

But this was by no means proved; nor was it easy to prove. For Maria Corleone lived at her country house, which she somewhat maliciously called " Isola," for all the world as if she had been on an island. Nobody knew exactly what she did there; nor was there any chance of keeping watch on her. This year, in particular, her life had been most secluded. Contrary to the custom recently adopted by high society, she had fixed no at-home days, and even on her holiday she made no attempt to lend variety to her existence by holding official visiting days. Chance calls from the owners of villas in her district were also rare. Society was not disposed to run after a lady who, at formal receptions, did not allow anyone, not even ladies, to be seated in her presence. Despite the heat, Prince George used to stay in the capital unless, that is to say, he tottered about one of the fashionable watering-places on the East coast. Thus he just put in an appearance at Isola two or three times during the course of the summer, and then only stayed a few hours.

" I do not like the look in Madame's eyes," he had remarked to his friend Baron Steiner on taking leave at the end of his last visit. " They always seem to be looking at something two inches above my head, as if they did not credit my bald pate with being able to wear a crown."

Old Baron Steiner, who by the by was the Princess's most constant visitor at Isola, and whom she regarded almost as a friend of the family (for, truth to tell, he was a *cicisbeo,* an

old gallant, who could be shocked by nothing), was one of the most remarkable personalities in Florentine society of the day. The sharp tongues of the old aristocracy always referred to him as the *Baronissimo,* no doubt with the idea of ridiculing the pompous dignity of his bearing which amounted almost to a travesty of the real article, and of betraying their justifiable scruples regarding the genuineness of his claim to nobility. To judge from his name, Baron Steiner was a German; but he spoke every European tongue as if he had been born to it, and nobody knew anything about his origin. There were even some sceptics, who, in view of his shapely aquiline nose, his somewhat protruding lower lip, his mysterious wealth and his indifference in matters of Faith, concluded that he was a Jew. But, caring nothing for gossip, he strode through the various drawing-rooms of society, his feet in *escarpins,* a ridiculous black wig on his head, and his eternal eyeglass gleaming in the parched skin of his face, always contriving to lend fresh zest to his declining years, by means of two distinct pastimes — secretly enjoying the stupidity of his fellows, and indulging his passionate, almost maniacal love of pictures and antiques. He possessed a valuable and extremely jealously guarded gallery of old masters, and a set of engravings which was unquestionably the most important private collection in the capital. His small, unpretentious-looking house in the Borgo San Lorenzo was a museum; though but few ever had the chance of seeing it. He possessed the vast knowledge and the somewhat coy versatility of the Encyclopædists, although without their ever-ready communicativeness; for as a rule he was extremely reserved. His connoisseurship in matters of art, on the other hand, was known all over the city, and was probably the key which had opened to him not only the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy, but even the private study of the sovereign. He was the terror of all auction sales, when he did not conduct them himself — and the mephistophelian adviser of all the English nobility who came to buy pictures. For on this point his passion was almost demoniacal. He paid out purse-proud stupidity and

vapid snobbery by means of unblushing fraud; though this much could be said in his favour, that he never did so for his own profit, and at times even lost by it. For, with the object of providing material for the gullible, he supported an exceedingly skilful staff of copyists, restorers and masons, and never sold the spurious masterpieces himself, but left both the business and its profit to some poor devil of a painter or sculptor, whom he knew to be gifted though starving.

But the outside world knew nothing of these dark avocations, although it suspected that Baron Steiner's wealth was probably derived from more or less secret deals in art. Neither did the outside world know how the Baron could have become the friend of the Pretender, a *noceur* who cared nothing for intellectual and artistic manners. It had seen the two together for the first time a good many years previously, when they had arrived from Rome. That had been in the days of Napoleon, when the Prince's hopes of a throne were at their zenith. For the Emperor, in one of his constructive moods, had, as a matter of fact, once spent ten whole minutes deliberating on the possibility of playing the Pretender off against the hostile northern power in question. These ten minutes had been spent at Fontainebleau, when Murat had presented the Prince to him, and when the conversation had fortunately turned upon horse-breeding, about which Prince George actually knew something. But that same evening the Emperor had forgotten not only the subject of horse-breeding, but that of the Pretender's claims and the Pretender himself into the bargain. Indeed he forgot them all as he alone knew how to forget. But for Prince George those ten minutes were an indelible memory and to his dying day he was able to repeat word for word what every one present had said. In those days he had been the admirer and supporter of the Emperor. He remained so, even when he was obliged to recognise that his attitude had brought him not a whit nearer to his throne. And he became more obstinately attached than ever when he found himself opposed to the deaf ears of his contemporaries, even when the meteor had fallen on to a spot

in the Atlantic Ocean. Possibly he had discovered a similar sympathy for Bonaparte in Baron Steiner, and this led to their friendship; or was it the less edifying fact that the Baron, from the very first moment of their acquaintance, had always been lavish with his "Sires" in addressing him? It was also possible that the Prince was the Baron's friend for purely financial reasons. In any case, society ultimately shelved the problem of their friendship, and gradually grew accustomed to seeing the gaunt, jerky, bowed form of Prince George by the side of the fastidiously dandified *Baronissimo*.

Steiner had played an exceedingly mysterious part in the Prince's marriage. And it was said, though on very inadequate evidence, that he had actually brought the match about in order to finance his friend. It was, however, quite certain that he had frequented the lady's house, when she was still Contessina. But as he maintained a skilfully balanced attitude between the couple, and remained the husband's friend while still retaining his position as the wife's confidant, the world, in the end, not venturing to decide whom he intended to help in the match, never referred to the subject.

Maria Corleone appreciated the old Baron as the immensely clever, and, beneath his buffoonish exterior, loveable creature that he was. She confided in him a good deal, though not in everything; for in spite of the many years she had known him, she always felt a certain uneasiness and anxiety in his presence. And, as she experienced this feeling with no one else, she soon gave up trying to see through the extraordinary man, as she had endeavoured to do in the early days of their acquaintance. Thus old Baron Steiner, who at one time had expressed a paternal attachment for her, was the only person whom she never treated with any haughtiness or arrogance. She respected him, that is to say, even more than she did the Grand Duke; for in dealing with the old man her strong position as a woman seemed always to be strangely undermined, as though she had become a child again.

Even the Princess had never understood the friendship be-

tween her husband and the Baron. But, whether from tact or from an unconscious desire to preserve her own secrets, she never asked either of them to explain the mystery. It was only just recently, when, after the Prince's last visit to Isola, the Baron had returned to the terrace from accompanying his friend, and she had noticed the faintest of smiles on his face, that she had dared suddenly, almost brusquely, to put this question. It was as if the indulgent irony in the old man's face had forced her to it. He looked at her with a calm but cheerful expression.

"You don't understand, Principessa, how I can be that man's friend? But why do you say 'that man'? For in the first place you are after all his wife, a wife whom he always treats with respect. Besides, the Prince is not nearly so stupid as people think. And finally he has the kindest of hearts. It is the only superlative thing about him. But it suffices. He is much kinder hearted than I am, Principessa, and than — well, than many other people."

"Even than I am," interjected Maria Corleone. "Why did you make that embarrassed pause, and then follow it up with a generalisation, Steiner? That is not like you."

"*Per Bacco,* Princess!" said the old man with a laugh, rocking his small head from side to side. "I had no wish to shame you in addition to giving you a necessary rebuke. But if you insist, then let me also tell you that many of your cousins with their high sounding historical names, and their diminutive brains crammed with a knowledge of heraldry, have probably often already put precisely the same question to the Prince, and have also used the expression 'that man' in referring to me. So you will readily understand that I am right to take exception to the phrase."

The Princess looked at him somewhat uneasily, and began to feel faint promptings of anxiety. Nevertheless, she knew the wonderful man too well not to feel that he was prepared to speak — to say unusual and disquieting things. She was no coward, however, and did not beat a retreat.

"I bow to your rebuke, Steiner," she replied, "and do not mind in the least if you do make me feel ashamed. You are a chivalrous man. But so far you have not given me to understand that you decline to answer my question as such, that you prefer not to answer it. Or am I wrong?"

The old Baron blinked the somewhat staring eye behind his square, black-rimmed and black-beribboned monocle, which was famous all over Florence.

"*Altezza,*" he replied, obviously in good spirits, "*Altezza Reale,* I have been expecting you to ask this question for the last eight years. But I confess that I have not been considering how to answer it all that time. I have only just begun to think about that in the last eight minutes, or perhaps a moment or two longer. We all have our great and small secrets."

As he said these words he did not look at her, but merely contemplated his finger-nails, which were a little too obviously manicured. Maria Corleone felt that he had averted his eyes not on his own but on her account, and she blushed. But she said nothing. Steiner gave her time to reply. But as she still remained silent, he went on in his friendly way.

"We all have our secrets," he repeated, and his voice sounded grave. "And it is a good thing that they should be hidden, because they are seldom beautiful. Mine, for instance — for my long life has drawn me through many a dark pit right and left of the strait path, Princess — mine, for instance, are for the most part distinctly ugly. To answer your question, I should have to refer to a certain black chapter in the by no means simple book of my life . . ."

Maria Corleone interrupted him softly and a little hastily:

"But listen, Steiner, I am the very last person to extort confidences. My question was not meant nearly as seriously as your answer is. My question was a whim. And I won't have you, Steiner, I won't have you of all men . . ."

She stopped. The old man looked at her, and his eyes, which were already a little dim, seemed of such an incorruptible grey, that they banished subterfuge.

"Oh but you will," he said, with a low chuckle, and laid his

finger on his fleshless chin. "You will have me do so now *Excellenza,* and I wish to do so now. It is a good thing to conceal one's depths. But it is even better to lay them bare at the right moment and before the right people. That is the best method of teaching one to be secretive. Besides," he continued, in an altered tone of voice, and making a little gesture of relief with his hand, "regarded in the proper light my little story is not so very dreadful. For whether I became the Prince's friend as the result of instructions or of my own free will, it comes to the same thing in the end . . ."

Maria Corleone sat up in her chair.

"I don't quite understand," she said.

"Of course you don't, Princess," Steiner rejoined by way of confirmation, "on the strength of this little introduction, you could hardly be expected to understand. But let me have my say. A few words will be sufficient. I became his friend eighteen years ago, by order of the great realm which he — and perhaps you too, *Altezza* — would so much like to rule. I may call myself his friend, because I always contrived to turn his claims into the harmless direction required — in other words, because I defeated them, which is a good thing both for Europe and for himself. I must tell you that for about twenty-five years I have been, and am still, a political agent in the employ of that same realm. I might equally well say that I am their spy, had I not performed duties for them which place me in a very much higher category. With all my slightness of build, I am a more formidable enemy of the great Emperor than an Austrian division at full strength. But I am paid for what I do."

"Ah!" was all that Maria Corleone said, and, rising to her feet, she went over to the stone balustrade of the terrace. Before her lay a broad avenue of cypresses which, cutting through the wall of the park, led the eye across the Florentine plain. The midsummer heat hung like a mist over the city, which could hardly be discerned beyond the last undulations of the rolling green hills.

"Yes," said old Baron Steiner, after a long pause, looking

steadily at the young woman's back. "You need not force yourself to any revision of your opinion about me, your Highness. My activities have not made me better or worse than I was before. And they have lain extremely lightly on my conscience. And in regard to my dealings with you, they have not weighed on my mind in the least."

"On the contrary," said the young woman, as if to herself. But the old man still had very sharp ears.

"Perhaps on the contrary, I agree," he repeated almost as if he were pleased. "So it is as well that we waited both with question and answer for eight years. Otherwise we should not be able to say what we are saying, and . . ."

He, too, now rose, and stepped over to the Princess. He too gazed down the sunlit avenue, to the valley quivering in the summer heat. And, without turning to look at her, he continued:

" . . . and I could not have implored you, Maria, to be more prudent."

Maria Corleone turned towards him and examined his small birdlike profile. Does he know? she asked herself for the second time. Baron Steiner smiled, as if he were answering her.

"I feel sure that you grasp the moral of my story, Princess. Does one have to be an old fox like myself, in order voluntarily to confess one's secrets and thus take people by surprise with them? You are neither old, nor are you a vixen, *Altezza;* you are a woman, a passionate woman. Be on your guard!"

"I know," she said, deeply touched, and made a movement as if she wished to seize his hand. "You are such an exceptional man to lay your own soul bare so as to be able to warn me. But it is too late now for me to go back. It has been too late for a long while now. And . . . and, my friend, it is extremely dangerous, to know anything about these things . . ."

"By Jove!" cried Steiner with a laugh, "the danger of your Party! But it does not frighten me much. You are not actually going to denounce me, are you, dear lady? But you,

Maria," he added with grave emphasis, "you ought to be afraid, your heart should feel qualms — in the face of the Sovereign's great and beautiful heart, and his great and beautiful love."

"Oh God!" groaned Maria Corleone, "Oh God!"

6

Gioia, the beggar, turned cautiously round, when he was certain that Checca was setting him free, and watched her hurrying northward along the Via dei Servi. He shook his head anxiously, and plunged down into the maze of little alleys which led from the Duomo to the San Firenze quarter. In great agitation he hastened on his way, as fast as his legs would carry him, for all the world as if he did not belong to the streets, but only to the goal at which he was aiming. The gigantic thumb remained erect in an attitude of anxious obedience; but his begging hand was in his pocket, so that he might not be hindered by any charitable deeds from fleeing out of the way of his fellows who had suddenly become so dangerous.

Truth to tell, Checca was once again making her way out of the city, and retracing the steps she had taken in the morning, defying the absurdly fierce heat of this autumn day which made even the dust of the streets bake. When, at the end of the highway, which simmered between the lofty walls of a park and groves of olive trees burnt by the sun, the sharp contours of the hill of Fiesole loomed blazing before her, dotted here and there with red and white houses, it suddenly struck her that this return journey had not been ordered, and might not even be desired. She knew that the Signore did not like impulsive actions of this kind, and that it was his habit to punish them with angry looks, which she dreaded above all things. She halted and passed the back of her hand over her eyes, which were stinging with the fierce light. She noticed that her brow was all wet, and this seemed to astonish her. The road in front of her rolled down like milky lava to the little

excise house of San Domenico. It was there, as she knew, that the Strada Fiesolana began, which was so terribly steep and had such fiendishly burning cobbles. For a moment she was overcome with lassitude. She thought of why she was returning and hesitated. Then, continuing her journey, she said aloud, "No!" she need fear no angry looks: for what she had to report was well worth all her trouble.

Nevertheless, her knees trembled and her heart beat frantically when, an hour later, she reached Borgunto. The Signorina was visibly shocked, for the woman before her looked the image of what she imagined a messenger of bad tidings would look like; and when Checca saw the pale horror on the girl's face, she became even more breathless and confused than she had been a moment before.

Maddalena shook her by the shoulder.

"What's the matter, Checca? In God's name what can have happened?"

The woman shook her head and waved a hand. She wanted to calm the girl, but immediately started coughing. Madonna! she thought in despair, this cough, this confounded cough, always lasts so long! Her poor breast heaved convulsively, continually shaken by short malignant spasms. At last she was obliged to press a handkerchief to her mouth, for it was not unlikely that blood would be there, and she did not want this to be seen. So with her other hand she made deprecating signs, to ward off the girl's pity and to ally her qualms.

Fortunately the Signore was asleep, taking his usual siesta after lunch. Maddalena quickly shut the door of the tiny kitchen, into which she had drawn Checca, and which was separated from the living rooms by a narrow passage. The elder woman, after having drunk a little water, recovered her breath.

"It's nothing, nothing, Signorina," she panted in embarrassment, "at least nothing very bad! Madonna, my cough! and this heat! Well, then, fat Don Lionello — you know, Signorina, the abbot Vacca — has been following Gioia, and to-

day he stopped him and tried to question him. That is all. I wanted to report this to the Master to-day before nightfall."

Maddalena, who had calmed down, reflected. She frowned. The two small furrows above the bridge of her nose altered her face strangely. For the moment her expression was faintly evil. On her brow, which was still smooth and soft, there were formed just above her eyebrows two small angry lumps. A girl who could look like that might be capable of anything.

"You are a good honest woman, Checca, a most excellent woman," she said absent-mindedly.

Close by a door was heard to open. Guerra enjoyed the light sleep of a man who is always on the alert, the sort of sleep which produces a special kind of instinct that acts as a sentry. The feeling that some stranger had entered the apartment had awakened him. The elder woman became uneasy and looked towards the door.

"The Signore . . ." she murmured anxiously. Guerra came in, his face still slightly bloated and flushed with sleep.

"What, you here again, Checca?" he enquired in none too friendly tones. "Why? Anything serious?"

"The good soul," his sister replied for the frightened woman, "has climbed up here in all this heat to report that fat Vacca has been following the old man, and has been trying to make him blab."

Guerra was silent a moment, and frowned much as his sister had done a moment before.

"What did he want to know?" he asked curtly. Checca replied hastily:

"Whether Gioia knew Signor Scaleterra and the Princess, Signore. Gioia of course said No."

"Oh, is that it? And did he ask any more questions?"

"I — don't think so," replied Checca with some hesitation. "Gioia then left him. I saw him do so with my own eyes."

"I see," Guerra observed, and looked at his sister, who gave a little shrug of her shoulders. "Very well, Checca," he said, turning once more to the elder woman, and his voice sounded

grateful, "it was very wise and very good of you to come. Your news is most important. Many thanks. And now just rest yourself a bit."

He went back to the door, but remained standing on the threshold, as if he wanted to say something, but could not for the minute thing what it was.

"Yes," he said a moment later, without turning round, "of course Gioia will have to disappear for a while."

"Yes, of course," Checca rejoined softly, "that is just what I thought."

"It wouldn't be a bad thing," he said half over his shoulder, "if you were to keep a rather sharper eye on him. Do you follow me, Checca?"

He did not wait for her "yes," but returned to his sitting-room. Maddalena followed him. Guerra passed a hand over his brow.

"Do you think the old man has blabbed?"

"No," said Maddalena thoughtfully. "He is much too frightened. He is much too much in the hands of his sin for that! I mean Checca. But the poor woman is consumptive. She may not survive him."

"And he must not survive his sin," said Guerra calmly. Maddalena raised her eyebrows.

"My God, no," she said, stirred by unpleasant thoughts. "But the most important thing for the moment is that the dreadful abbot, and therefore Caminer, should not already have discovered the connection between Scaleterra and Maria, and the correct meaning even of the thumb. Perhaps it would be best if you were not to go there this evening, Gasto."

"I can't do that," said Guerra decisively, after a moment's reflection. "I must not accustom our people to false alarms, quite apart from the fact that things are now so far advanced that not even I can postpone the moment for action. On the contrary, it seems to me, that just today the danger is not so very great. Caminer is on the road, but he has not reached the goal. We must try to forestall him by action. Besides . . ."

He stopped. The girl looked at him with a strange expression.

"You mean, Gasto, that the abbot may still be caught?"

"Yes, but it is a revolting job. It is also somewhat risky, Madda. The buck has brains."

"Pooh!" the girl ejaculated. Both were silent for a while. Then Guerra observed unexpectedly:

"Things will not go well, Madda."

"My God, and why not? For heaven's sake don't allow yourself to get faint-hearted. You might infect Maria. She will certainly not be an easy piece to play."

"Yes, well, exactly — Maria," he interrupted emphatically.

Two hours later, when a gentle north wind had sprung up, Checca left the house, and feeling rested and in good spirits, strode down the road towards the Piazza. Shortly afterwards, the Signorina might have been seen going out, her face completely shaded by the fashionable poke bonnet she was wearing. She was probably setting out on one of those long walks of hers, for she was carrying a stick. She took the opposite direction to her nurse, the main road that went up the mountains, past the last few houses in the suburb. Then she entered the road which turned right, and seemed to be going in the direction of San Clemente. But a few hundred paces further on, she left this road and took a steep path to her right through a pine-wood, which soon leaving the slender shadow of the trees, and becoming more difficult, wound up and down, up and down, round Mt. Ceceri, over boulders, rolling stones and stretches of burnt grass, until it somewhat surprisingly landed her in the main road to San Majano. There a carriage was waiting.

When it had grown dark the Signore also left the house, and, armed with a small lantern, went the same way.

THE FIRST CIRCLES

I

The motives which had led the young student, Gasto Guerra of Pisa, to adopt a political career, were as immoral as they could possibly be. He had no money, and an unknown Party offered him money on certain conditions, which were in the highest degree mysterious, but which immediately appealed to the young man's love of dabbling with men, ideas and danger.

It was an exceedingly skilful move on the part of the Central Bureau of the Party, and of its numerous propagandists, so well-schooled in psychology, not only to seek out idealists, but chiefly those men who were gifted to play a demagogic or even a purely disciplinary part. Their method was to ferret out the spiritual or material situation of the men whom they thought suitable. Then, by unearthing some fact about them which could be used as a lever, they began to negotiate. Thus thousands of small people, like Gioia, had been caught by simple baits, and big men, like Guerra, by the payment of their accumulated bills. Others, too, were caught in different ways; but only a very few needed so trifling a spur to a life-long effort, as the student of Pisa had in his day. And, strange to say, in addition to other things, his appearance rendered him exceptionally fitted for the future that had been devised for him. He was amazingly handsome, winning and impressive — an ideal junior lead in a tragedy.

Guerra was the only son of an advocate of Livorno, from whom he inherited his brains, his unscrupulousness, and the art of eloquence, of gesticulation and of squandering money.

To his mother, who had been dead many years, he probably owed his good looks and something in his soul, which at that time had not yet developed. When his father unexpectedly had to depart this happy life — he had complained one evening of having eaten an oyster that was not quite fresh, and three days later he had died — Gasto was suddenly confronted with the amazing fact that there was no money in the home, that the stately house in the centre of the town, as well as the little villa on the coast of Ardenza, was heavily mortgaged, and that all old Guerra had had to pay for his luxurious way of living had been the large income derived from his profession as an advocate. The sale of the practice and the real estate yielded only just enough to allow Gasto with great frugality to continue his studies, and have his ten-year-old sister, Maddalena, who promised to be a great beauty, placed in an aristocratic convent close to San Miniato near Florence, where she could be educated in a manner suitable to her station.

But Gasto was neither inclined nor able to save. His trifling student debts quickly mounted up into pressing obligations. The most infamous usurers in Livorno and Florence were familiar with his signature. And as his only source of income — gambling — was neither lucrative nor reliable, he began to take a high hand with his luck, in order to make it a little more favourable. Things went all right for a while; then people became suspicious. At last an extremely distressing incident occurred, which created quite a sensation, and even set the disciplinary board of the University in action. The emissary of the Secret Party, a young University lecturer on jurisprudence, believed the time was now ripe to enrol Guerra in his Party. But he thought he would wait until the student had been subjected to his first examination by the University judges. He wished to enjoy the comedy to the end, so that certain suppositions regarding Guerra's usefulness might be confirmed. Confronted by the judicial bench of the University, Guerra displayed so much eloquence, and such genuine righteous indignation, that it was quite plain he bewildered his

listeners. He conducted his own case with a passion which was sufficiently deceptive to conceal the sober designs behind it. He fought a duel in which no blood flowed, and finally succeeded in obtaining his complete rehabilitation, a process which culminated in an official recantation on the part of his accusers and a written declaration of their esteem and respect. Shortly afterwards, he had a long interview with the young University Don in question, whose house he left only in the early hours of the morning. In the course of the next day, he paid all the bills outstanding against him.

His rise within the Party itself was meteoric. It might even be said that he skipped the novitiate altogether, and straightway demanded a position of authority. Without any scruple, he turned his amorous relations with the wife of a patrician of Pisa, who was a favourite at Court, to the account of the Party, and obtained for the Central Bureau certain important details about the Grand Duke's attitude to his brother-in-law, a man who at the time was a very real Prince of Piedmont. This information, which was the first achievement for his Party, determined the speed of his ascent, and led to his being sent straightway into the firing line in Piedmont, which was on the eve of a revolution. He left Pisa and enrolled himself as a student in Turin. The fact that the heroic Santarosa himself — the head of the movement, which was beginning to appear above the fog of mystery and to provoke the wonder of the world — knew of the young man's presence in the town and sent for him intoxicated Guerra with joy. And the great man's smile and handshake converted him into a devoted adherent of the Party.

"My young friend," said Santarosa, "you strike me as one of those men who have courage when crowds are watching you. Do you think you could show courage before a whole auditorium of onlookers?"

"Yes, General," replied Guerra breezily, concealing the fears that stirred his heart. But he was brave; he could not be anything else than brave when thousands of eyes were watch-

ing him. And this is what happened on the following evening, when he and three other militants — wonderfully handsome men like himself, with idealistic faces — appeared with red caps on their heads and red carnations in their button-holes in a box at the Teatro Reale. They were cheered immediately, and at a favourable moment Guerra's mighty voice roared: *"A basso l'Austria!"* The crowd took up the cry, and the Carbonari among them shouted: "Independence and a Constitution!" and waved black, red and blue ribbons. Police officers forced their way into the theatre and arrested the four students. The whole audience hissed violently. With one jerk of his mighty shoulders, Guerra freed himself from the grasp of the embarrassed policemen, and coming to the front of the box, raised his arms aloft, threw back his fine head, showing his teeth as if in a paroxysm of enthusiam and inspiration, and exclaimed to the assembled throng amid deathly silence:

"The hour has come! Brothers! Brothers! Freedom!"

Whereupon, turning round, he held out his crossed hands with a regal gesture to the police, as if he expected to be handcuffed. But the police had brought no handcuffs with them; it had probably never occurred to them that they would be required, and they merely seized the four students by the arms and led them away as though they were insignificant rowdies. Meanwhile, the crowd, who had not failed to notice that Guerra's exit had to some extent miscarried, roared with laughter.

Truth to tell, the Revolution began on that evening in January in the year 1821. On the following day, three hundred students, armed only with sticks, attacked the guard at the gate of the citadel, with the object of setting their four companions free. Grenadiers were hurried to the spot to support the police. Shots were fired, and there were some fatal casualties. A certain Prince of Piedmont, who belonged to a collateral branch of the reigning house, and had been brought up in Genoa, and through his education and views now stood

in apparent opposition to the Court, had for this reason been selected by the Secret Party as the future King of an independent Italy. He now started his equivocal and scarcely pleasant rôle. At all events, his first thought was to see that the four students should be set free. In the hall of the University Guerra experienced his second triumph. He was acclaimed as though he were a martyr. He thanked them in a speech full of sentiment, confidence, ingenuousness and youth, and made haste to pass his final examination that very week. He passed it *summa cum laude,* without having been properly prepared. Meanwhile the ill-fated Revolution pursued its flabby course, condemned to failure from the outset by the complete suppression of the Neapolitan rising, and was lost in the sand. It is true that Alessandria and Turin both rose in revolt, and that Santarosa, on his own responsibility, declared war against Austria. The irresolute King abdicated, naming as Regent the Prince supported by the Opposition; the Constitution was drawn up, and Santarosa was even made Minister for War, with Guerra (both under assumed names, by the by) commandant of the volunteer student battalions. But the Regent, anxious to make his own position safe, whatever happened, played a double game, and finally betrayed the Revolution to the new King, the energetic brother of the late monarch, who, without any difficulty, succeeded with the help of Austria in suppressing the insurrection and bringing about the usual reaction in the country. The Regent went into exile in Tuscany. Santarosa, who refused to withdraw into the mist of the Secret Party, fled to Greece, where, like the illustrious Byron, he died fighting for the Hellenic cause. Guerra, however, who declared that he had been present at the defeat of the student corps at Vercelli, was already in France, when the special courts in Piedmont hurled their threats at the Universities. He was acclaimed as a hero by the Central Bureau, loaded with Carbonarian honours, and very shortly afterwards entrusted with the glorious task of watching the movements of the ex-Regent in Florence.

One of the peculiarities of Guerra's political career was the fact that the great failures of a period full of contradictions seemed in his presence to change their meaning and to raise him on a shield of glory, as if, for all the world, he had been the deserving leader of a triumphant movement. But this was not altogether accidental. It partook rather of the nature of a trait in his character like his demagogic temperament, which he used with grace and skill to exploit the romantic tendencies of the times — ever ready to admire anyone who had been defeated by brutal means — for his own ends and those of the Cause he represented. He enjoyed the privilege of all young and handsome men, of being sure to please quite naturally, and to be sympathetic without much demonstration or effort. He had proved to his Party that he could employ his talents unhindered by any sense of decency and with an extraordinary lack of scruple. He had shown it that he could be used in every phase of the struggle, whether actively or passively, whether as a spy, a propagandist, or valiant hero. The Party, who knew their man, proved its gratitude by showing him a degree of deference, and giving him an amount of power which, while they ill-befitted his twenty-one years, precisely on that account made him happy and bound him to them.

Owing to the failure of the revolutions and the embittered attitude of the ruling powers, the Central Bureau could no longer make use of his heroism, or even of his gifts as a demagogue; but they could still turn his cameo features to account. The Grand Master of the Party, a white-haired, nameless man of uncertain age, with eyes which, though intelligent and kindly, could in a trice read an alarming amount in the soul of anyone he had before him (Guerra enjoyed the privilege of having an audience with him in Paris), had told him quite plainly what was immediately required of him, the moment he had taken stock of him.

"My young brother," he said, "'if a woman prostitutes herself in the service of the Party, she retains her honour. And if you, who have proved yourself a hero, can also command

your passions and make them subservient to our sacred aims — you understand me, my friend? — if you — through your body and your senses can promote our common cause, just as if you were using yourself as a weapon or as an eloquent spoken appeal, such services would not even be honourable prostitution, but manly self-sacrifice for an idea. And that is honour itself. You, G.G., will be provided with a passport in the name of the Vicomte d'Houssonville; you will be received in Florence by the French Ambassador, and presented at Court by him. To this extent can we help you in your mission."

It was only through the director of the Bologna section that Guerra first heard that his duties would consist not only in watching the ex-Regent, but also, with the help of the Contessina Labia Corleone, who belonged to the Neapolitan revolutionary group, in winning the political fugitives from the south over to the Tuscan Party, which was still very weak; and, above all, in influencing any relations the lady might have with the sovereign for the purposes of the Central Bureau. Concerning the events in Naples, in so far as the Countess had been their central figure, and concerning her connection with the Court of Tuscany, the Secretary of the Florentine Branch would give him all the necessary information.

All this Guerra was told on the day before he crossed the Tuscan frontier. The vast proportions which his task seemed to have assumed produced in him a kind of giddy desire for action, without, however, leading him to give a thought to the possible failure of his mission, or if its immensity. This was more particularly so, seeing that it never occurred to him that Fate might in the end lose patience over his constant and ever more daring assaults upon her, and turn round and smother him. At that time he was still too young, and too thoroughly adapted to his pleasant existence, to measure the dangers of the game, whether by his own feelings or from the standpoint of others. He still confounded ability with destiny, and was tempted to see in Almighty God himself no more than an ele-

mentary master-juggler. He considered himself sufficiently competent and in good training to be able, with luck on his side, to mould and arrange the little fragments of destiny which had been allotted to him — whether men or political facts — according to his fancy. Certainly he had to reckon with the dominating factor of the Party programme; but his fancy was not entirely identified with the objects of his Party. There remained a tiny residue of bright ego behind, which need not necessarily disappear or become tarnished, even if the idea fought for should ultimately fail. But such weighings of motives lay hidden away in his unconscious mind.

He was the most handsome Vicomte who, since the days of the *ancien régime,* had stepped across the floors of the French Ambassador's Palace, and his perfect Italian was explained as due to a Genoese mother, alas, long since dead! The Central Bureau had provided him with an imposing genealogical tree of the House of d'Houssonville, which he studied eagerly on his journey. Thus when he was confronted by great connoisseurs of heraldry — who in the Court society of the Restoration were held in high repute — he was serenely *au fait.* Moreover, the Ambassador, a perfect *grand seigneur* with very tolerant political views, which did not always agree with those of his Government, seemed to have been expecting the arrival of the young nobleman. In his presence Guerra was conscious of the man's knowledge of certain secret matters; but far from disconcerting him, this actually made him feel confident, and he never even attempted to clear the question up. For he had the most implicit confidence in the Central Bureau, which he knew was very intimately connected with many active diplomats abroad. And the charming Ambassador avoided any suggestion of irony when he pronounced the words *"cher Vicomte,"* and not the faintest sign of amusement puckered his eyelids. He confined himself to being ever courteous and helpful after the manner of a society mentor.

Guerra, however, was not only a Vicomte, he was also a plenipotentiary of his Party. This was an important post in the organisation of the secret society, which gave him the right to make use of all the material power and connections of the Party as he might think fit. As, however, there can be no rights without duties, and, moreover, as he was well aware, no one held a position in the Party without being supervised by another of its officials, he did not look particularly pleased when, on the very morning after his arrival in Florence, a woman asked to see him.

"*Una donna,*" said the *Cameriere* of the fashionable Lungarno hotel, *Nuova York,* at which Guerra had put up. The man said "*una donna,*" not "*una signora,*" and in the faintly contemptuous tone of his voice lay the implication that, if he liked, the Signor Conte could quite well receive the visitor in his dressing-gown. Guerra nodded, yawning sulkily, as he immediately called to mind the appreciative words with which his Party colleague in Bologna had referred to their female representative in Florence — "an exceptionally efficient woman known as Number One, his adjutant." This must be the representative of the Party who was to check his conduct. It therefore behooved him to keep his eyes open, to be on the alert, even now. For reasons which were not quite clear in his mind, he was annoyed at the excessive meticulousness of the Party-machine. Someone was knocking at the door.

"*Avanti, avanti!*" he cried rudely, possibly because he was annoyed, and possibly also to establish the proper distance between himself and her from the start. Moreover he turned his back to the door as it opened, and with some deliberation lighted a cigar. This took him a little time. He was surprised to hear no sound from his visitor, not even an embarrassed cough, or greeting. At length he turned round. In the doorway stood a faded young woman, or a woman already old (it was impossible at first to tell which). Her face was haggard and yellow, her eyes had a long-suffering expression, and she

seemed to have an unwieldy mass of very fair hair. She was cleanly and simply dressed, like a shopkeeper's wife.

"Well?" said Guerra coldly; then, recollecting himself, he added in friendly tones, "Good day!"

"Good day, your lordship," replied the grave woman, and coming up to him quickly, she took his hand, pressed his middle finger slightly, and whispered the password, "Corleone!"

To his surprise Guerra saw that her hair was white, but that nevertheless she was not an old woman. Quite unwittingly he smiled the seductive boyish smile which so often won him a woman's heart, and murmured absent-mindedly:

"Thank you! I am G.G. I hope we shall get on all right with each other."

Strange and utterly absurd as it may seem, the old spinster blushed. It was a peculiar blush, confined to her brow and her prominent cheek bones, making her suddenly look as if she painted her face like an old courtesan. A great joy beamed in her beautiful sad eyes. Guerra at once understood the impression he had made.

"I think," he said ingratiatingly, once more holding out a hand to her, "I think, Madame, that you and I will get on famously together."

The woman hesitated a moment, then bending forward with a peculiar movement of her body, she kissed his hand. He did not withdraw it, nor was he particularly surprised by this outburst of feeling. "I need no longer expect any danger from that quarter," he said to himself, and smiled again. The woman had straightened herself and looked exceedingly embarrassed.

"I beg your pardon, Signore," she stammered, "I am very pleased — I am very happy to be able to work under you, under you particularly.

"Yes, yes," he said soothingly, "it pleases me too, Signora, Signora — what am I to call you?"

"Call me by my own name, Signore," she rejoined softly.

"I know it is not usual in the Party, and even forbidden; but it also has certain advantages. My name is Checca Gioia."

"Gioia!" said Guerra with a smile. "That is a beautiful name."

2

At that time the Contessina was still living at the French Ambassador's Palace. Nevertheless, a long time elapsed before Guerra succeeded in being introduced to her; for she lived in the strictest seclusion, and was never seen in society, even at the receptions and social functions given at the French Embassy. Guerra used the interval in order to obtain through Checca a fairly complete account of the affair in Naples in which the Contessina had been involved, and of the Grand Duke of Tuscany's interest in her person. Moreover, he had her every movement watched. But the results he obtained were exceedingly meagre; for she generally either kept in her own apartments, or in the most secluded corner of the Embassy grounds, and only varied her monotonous existence by taking innocent walks in the Cascine. Even Guerra's efforts to approach her father, the old Prince, also failed. For the latter was already deep in the throes of his negotiations with Naples regarding his rehabilitation, which the Tuscan sovereign had procured for him, and turned a deaf ear to the Carbonarian whispers of the young Vicomte. Moreover he was on the point of returning south. As, at this time, Guerra had not much to do or to think about, it suddenly occurred to him that among other things he was also a brother, and that his little sister, to whom he had hardly given a thought in the last breathless years, lived almost in sight of him — somewhere on those sunny slopes upon which his eye fell as he looked towards San Miniato. As a man of quick decisions and also because he was feeling somewhat bored (for he did not wish to complicate his conquest of the Countessina by troubles with other women), he sent Checca at once to the convent, to inform the Mother Superior that the Vicomte d'Houssonville, who was on a visit

to Italy, would be glad if he might be allowed to give his friend Guerra's greetings to his sister. Checca returned with a courteous invitation, together with a string of eulogies regarding the girl's intelligence. She had apparently met with no difficulty in procuring an interview with her, and had immediately made her understand the position.

Guerra readily shared Checca's high opinion of Maddalena's mental alertness; he even had reasons of his own for having her a good deal in his mind at the moment. On the appointed day, therefore, in the fine carriage which he hired for his own use and which looked almost like a private equipage, he drove across the Barriera San Niccolo towards the steep hill. It was early summer, and the world was beautiful and bright. The houses fell lower and lower behind the gradually ascending vehicle, the greeny gold stretches of meadow rolled cheerful and soft on either side, tender young vines hung meagre and pale green between the olive trees, while here and there a tall cypress stood out like a grave accent. Below, ever smaller and further away, lay the city, like a wonderfully clear etching, or a pure and passionate melody, free from all flourish and clamour and, as it were, joined to the sky by the domes of Santa Croce and Maria del Fiore, which seemed quite close; while to the left of them rose the slender earthly boldness of the Palazzo Vecchio tower. Nothing is difficult, Guerra thought to himself suddenly. It is not even difficult to become a great man, or to be one. For the moment he was not clear whether it was the present or the future in this idea that referred to himself. Moreover, he was in too happy a mood to be critical.

At last he reached his destination, and passing through the garden gate he ascended what seemed to be an endless avenue of cypresses, at the end of which — high up in the distance — stood the white convent, like the doors of Paradise; and finally he followed a timid but friendly sister to the visitor's room. It was a large strange apartment, a cross between the foyer of a theatre and a gigantic cage. Guerra could not help laughing

a little. The centre of the room, in which two solemn gateways crossed, was a brightly lighted hall, paved with large black and white flags, but devoid of any furniture, even seating accommodation. This portion of the room, which was intended for visitors, was surrounded by a heavy trellis-work, behind which the nuns stood with their charges. "What an extremely bright idea!" thought Guerra with some amusement. "Thus the parties on either side of the screen each imagine that it is the other who is standing behind the grill." He had to wait a few minutes, and then a tall slender girl appeared, who seemed well developed for her fourteen years, and was already endowed with womanly beauty. Guerra, who had not seen his sister since their father's death, was astonished. Maddalena stepped up to the grill smiling calmly.

"Here is Monsieur le Vicomte," said the nun who acted as doorkeeper, and then left them.

"You are bringing me messages from my brother?" said Maddalena aloud.

"Yes, Signorina," Guerra replied, and began to laugh; for no stranger was anywhere near. The girl looked at him with grave attention.

"If one had not heard all sorts of things," she said at last, "one would be inclined to assume that you have become a bit of a fraud, Gasto."

"Oh, Madda!" Guerra rejoined, "that is not a very sisterly welcome! It is not very respectful either towards your elder brother. You might as least have called me an arch-rogue while you were about it."

The girl smiled furtively.

"Of course you have reasons of your own for assuming a different name, Gasto."

"Little sister," he answered slowly, "I am always he alone whose name I bear. Little sister, outside this convent there is a world which is unspeakably vast and deep, and a life which demands innumerable names."

Madda was silent. "We have the same eyes," thought Guerra. "Her eyes are very fiery, and she also has my brow."

"It is true, is it not, Gasto," she asked him softly, "that you are a Carbonaro?"

"Yes," he replied, almost unwillingly. And at the same moment an extraordinary idea occurred to him, a bright thought, which seemed to illuminate the future.

They discussed trifles, their everyday lives and matters which relatives who have long been separated are wont to talk about. The nun doorkeeper shuffled in to them again, looking like a great melancholy moth.

Madda whispered quickly:

"Listen, Gasto, I want to be your sister. I don't want to be anything else than your sister. Think about it."

"She has the same blood," thought Guerra, and many other things occurred to his mind, as he walked back along the avenue of cypresses.

Like the Tuscan sky, even his mood knew no cloud in this month of June. For it was not long before he succeeded in getting the hand of the Countess Corleone to kiss. Truth to tell, it was the French Ambassador, who, with the good feeling of an old man of the world, suddenly asked the young nobleman one day:

"Would you not like to meet little Labia, Vicomte?"

Although he knew he was being observed, Guerra could not altogether suppress his surprise, as he replied that he would. For he had no recollection of having expressed any such desire. He had been too prudent, and knew, moreover, that it was more than probable that, in the ordinary course of events, he would be bound, sooner or later, to meet her. It is true he might have spared himself a few weeks of waiting, had he taken for granted that the old diplomat was endowed with so much understanding. For a moment he contented himself with meeting the Ambassador's subtle smile wth an eloquent look, and following him in silence into the grounds which

rose in a series of terraces behind the Embassy. Suddenly the Ambassador took him by the arm.

"Forgive this sudden familiarity, Vicomte; but in our case some outward and visible sign of friendship is required. The lady has quite naturally become a little bit suspicious of the world at large."

And thus they advanced arm in arm up the first terrace, which was hedged by laurel trees in bloom. As Guerra assumed they were being observed, he walked with his chest well thrown out and his shoulders back, so as not to appear too insignificant by the side of his tall slim companion. He spoke in soft though resonant tones in the most eloquent French he could command, and smiled seductively. The diplomat, too, was smiling, perhaps a trifle ironically, and addressed him as *"mon cher Vicomte."*

The Countess Corleone was lying reading in a hammock, swung between a dazzling red Judas tree and a milky white magnolia. She presented an extremely attractive picture. Guerra halted, hesitating and filled with admiration. She was dressed in black, and had the white skin and assurance of manner of the aristocrat. Her face, which was turned away from them towards her book, had a somewhat stony profile. "A cold and haughty creature!" thought Guerra, somewhat uneasy. "She must have heard us coming long ago!"

"Ah, look, there is our Contessina!" cried the Ambassador in a tone of friendly surprise. The girl looked up calmly. Guerra saw her long almond shaped eyes in the shadow of their lashes. Full face she looked quite different, though not less beautiful than in profile. But there was a dangerous vitality beneath her smooth skin; she could not be altogether good-natured, and in her firm mouth and fine aristocratic nose there lurked much unscrupulousness.

"Yes, your Excellency," she said, in friendly tones, "I always seem to be the only one to enjoy this beautiful Tuscan peace which is the property of France."

The Ambassador was infernally clever.

"And you will remain so, Contessina, even if your good nature alone prevented you from uttering that fatal 'Thank God!'" And with a bright smile he bowed. "We shall not disturb your meditations any longer. We must be off. I say — we . . . but you only know me, your old intruder! This is my young friend, the Vicomte d'Houssonville . . ."

As she nodded condescendingly, Guerra advanced a step or two. And since she waved a hand by way of greeting, he stepped up to the hammock and kissed her fingers. Incidentally, he had remained perfectly grave. An extremely subtle sense of the impression he made on others had restrained him from looking at this particular woman with his seductive smile. He muttered a few formal words. The Countess thanked him, and the gentlemen withdrew.

And that was all! Guerra was forced to admit that it was not much. And as he was accustomed to being honest with himself, he was obliged to acknowledge in his heart of hearts that neither her words nor any movement of her face justified him in cherishing any hope of having made a good impression. To all appearances, the Vicomte would either have but little success, or his victory would be slow. So be it! He still remained G.G. And thus no cloud arose to darken his sunny sky. His vanity was sufficiently cautious, in this perilous instance, not to set too much store by this first encounter, and he immediately set about arranging his second. He resolved to alter his tactics entirely. The grave face he had shown her fitted in well with his new scheme. He must look even graver when next she saw him.

Checca assured him that no further meeting had taken place between the Countess and the Grand Duke, since the latter had visited her at the French Embassy, and that for the time being there was no communication between them. As for the Contessina having secretly become the sovereign's mistress, that was quite out of the question. And Guerra knew for certain that in Court society nobody as yet knew anything

of the Grand Duke's attachment to little Labia. The Ambassador alone, in reply to a suggestive remark, smiled in his cryptic way and said:

"*Le jour viendra.*"

The next time the Contessina drove to the Cascine, a young man rode close up to her carriage and greeted her as he passed. It must have surprised her to meet the Vicomte d'Houssonville at an hour when the Park was not visited by the world at large. And it must have astonished her even more, not to say displeased her, to see the young rider turn his horse soon after meeting her and follow some distance behind her carriage. But she betrayed no sign. Neither did she tell her coachman to drive back. Almost at the end of the broad avenue, which ran straight and even between the Arno and the well-tended boxwood hedge, a lonely dairy lay among some trees on one side of the avenue. The Countess ordered her carriage to stop and told the coachman to fetch her a glass of milk. The rider behind immediately seized the opportunity and galloped forward.

"Contessina," he gasped, slightly out of breath. The girl interrupted him calmly:

"You will always find me ready at any time for any necessary interview in the Embassy itself. So there is no need whatever for you to compromise me under the eyes of my coachman and other eyes, which possibly we cannot see."

Guerra blushed vividly, and silently greeting her, rode away.

It would not have been very surprising if a few little clouds had appeared in his sky. But he had a happy nature and held no one, not even himself, responsible for the mistakes he had made. Moreover, if he thought about it at all, he was obliged to recognise that, all unwittingly, he was already far more deeply involved in his new tactics than he himself was aware. The only factor that gradually became distressing to his self-esteem was that *Deus ex machina* who almost always treated him with irony. He went straight to the Ambassador.

"Your Excellency," he began in the tone of one who wishes to inspire and demand confidence. "Your Excellency, there are certain hidden things which, as man to man, we can discuss without indiscretion, particularly when one is aware that both parties to the discussion are already familiar with them. You understand what I mean!"

With an expression of astonishment the Ambassador allowed the paper-knife with which he was toying to drop, and stared up with wide open eyes.

"You are mistaken, Vicomte," he replied, correcting him sharply. "I have not the faintest intention of understanding! But now you will understand me . . ."

Guerra, however, was hard of hearing. He frowned gravely.

"Very well," he said, weighing the words in his mind. "I realise that in certain cases it may not be opportune to hear what one already knows. But let us suppose the possibility that, unknown to us, a third party who is interested . . ."

"My dear young friend," the Ambassador interrupted, speaking more gravely than usual, "be thankful that I decline to think about your dark hypotheses, and even beg you to say no more about them. And if I may be allowed to tell you something definite, don't get yourself into trouble by creating trouble for me. What I know, if I may say so, has nothing to do with you, *cher ami,* and as to what you know, I wish to hear nothing about it. I am the King of France's Minister Plenipotentiary in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, as you may see from my visiting cards. And in our business a lot depends on visiting cards, does it not, Vicomte? And as to whether I may or may not be secretly better pleased with your bearing and the cut of your clothes than with your title remains, thank God, a matter of secondary importance. All the same, it amuses me to be able to whisper to you that if you like you can admire little Labia in her hammock again at this very moment. You may think what you like about that, and turn my whimsical fancy to whatever account you may think

fit. But do not let us talk any more about the insides of our brains. *Arivederla.*"

For once Guerra was taken aback. He found nothing so disconcerting as the calm, ironic and profound superiority of the Ambassador, which turned the weapon of his youth against him. At such moments he felt a fool, and blushed all the more vividly as the tell-tale shame glowed on his face and he tried to combat it. This was the case now. And he could only give a silent bow.

"You must not take offence, Vicomte," said the Ambassador. "That would be a pity."

"On the contrary, I am most grateful to you, your Excellency."

When he reached the ante-chamber he had to compose himself. Examining himself in a tall long glass, he grew solemn. Damn it, the burning cheeks and the look of a schoolboy who has been thrashed, ill befitted the representative of a great idea! Danger might be scorned, but it must not be made to look ridiculous. One must have the power not only to be responsible, but also to appear so. Then people would not dare to shame him, as had just happened in the Ambassador's study and that morning in the Cascine. He took careful stock of himself, and, waiting until his face had assumed the expression which suited his new standards, went into the grounds.

The Countess Corleone laid her book aside when she saw him coming. He greeted her with courteous reserve.

"This morning you referred to a necessary interview between us, Contessina," he began cautiously. "I am at your disposal."

"Thank you," she replied condescendingly. But she said no more. Guerra waited a few seconds, and, as she still did not speak, he observed:

"I trust you have forgiven my apparent importunity of this morning, Contessina. You are surely aware that no personal reasons were behind it?"

"Of course not," she rejoined. The three words cut him,

and even made him smart bitterly. A vein in his neck began to throb. He blinked nervously. Suddenly a question thrust itself upon him, as if it had been lurking behind his thoughts: Can it be that I love her? He became uneasy and therefore almost discourteous.

"Of course not," he repeated in tones unnecessarily loud. "So you seem to know, Contessina . . ."

"Certainly, Signore," she interrupted with some impatience, "I know, and you can spare yourself any further preliminaries. I am a *Carbonaro* of the Neapolitan branch."

Guerra smiled in a subtle, almost indulgent manner.

"I know too, Contessina," he replied, "indeed I know a good deal more. But you spare me the congratulations which in that case I should have to express to you in the name of the Party. Perhaps, however, you will permit me to ask the question — through whom did you discover that I was an emissary of the Party? This question has its importance from my point of view, Contessina."

For a moment the Countess looked him full in the face.

"As far as I am concerned, the question has no importance, Signore, if you are not able to answer it yourself," she said in an off-hand manner. Guerra bit his lip. His opponent was by no means simple to deal with.

"Very well," he said softly, "I am satisfied even to know that. But I trust I may hope, Contessina, that your attitude of defence will be confined to this case, which concerns our common host. Or are you no longer willing, or no longer in a position, to work for the Party?"

"That depends on the results of our interview," she said evasively. "Up to the present you have told me nothing about what you want, what you require of me."

"I am an official of the Central Paris Bureau," he replied modestly, "that is to say, in addition to working up the organisation of the new Tuscan branch, I have been entrusted by the Grand Master with a special task, which I can only discuss when I am sure of your co-operation. And this again depends

upon a particular circumstance, which — which is not quite clear . . ."

He stopped, apparently somewhat embarrassed.

"Please, Signore," said the Countess, slightly raising her brows, and trying to help him, "speak out as frankly as your duty commands."

"Very well, Contessina! The Central Bureau is not quite clear concerning the nature of your relations with the sovereign of Tuscany."

She sat up hastily, her face full of angry pride.

"The nature of my relations?" she demanded sharply. "Even in the mouth of an official of the Party, such an expression is ill-bred!"

Dropping her feet to the ground, she stood up. She was very tall — a little too tall. But she is extraordinarily well built, Guerra thought to himself, and stepped politely back. Her vehemence did not disturb him much; it even compensated him somewhat for his discomfiture of the morning. He was already quite pleased with himself, in his new rôle of a silent, cryptic agent (he was keeping the exemplary demeanour of the Ambassador before his mind's eye). And, finally, he was particularly pleased at the thought that the girl's indignation was after all justified, for the simple reason that there had been no relations between her and the Grand Duke.

"I beg your pardon," he rejoined coldly, "allow me to substitute for what I said, the extent of your obligations."

The Countess looked at him and became calmer. This displeased him. She returned to the hammock and swung gently to and fro.

"You look the little Vicomte," she said suddenly, and a puzzling expression came into her eyes, like a change of colour, a provoking change from gold to yellow. Guerra, completely taken aback, did not know whether her words were intended as a bait, as irony, or both. He was terrified of irony. He wished to remain master of the field.

"You are exceedingly kind, Contessina," he said with a

smile, "but my extremely plebeian name is Gasto Guerra, an aspiring lawyer by profession, a native of Livorno — if these things interest you."

"Oho! Gasto Guerra!" she said in her deep voice, "what a piece of imprudence on the part of a secret agent employed on a special mission!"

And now he smiled in his attractive open and youthful way. He did not trouble to think whether his smile were appropriate.

"Contessina, I have no misgivings about your sentiments — and to be sure I also know your name."

The Countess too smiled now.

"Good," she said, "but what has it to do with the Party, whether I have to be grateful to the sovereign for much or for little?"

The woman's strategy was peculiar. It was impossible to be too careful. Guerra was once more cool and grave.

"Of course it concerns the Party, Contessina, more especially in this case."

"Indeed," said the girl, and blinked. Her long lashes now made her expression obscure and even a little uncanny. "Indeed, Gasto Guerra. Now let me tell you something. I have all sorts of things in view, which may perhaps bring us together. But nothing is certain yet. My plans are at present hardly outlined. But of this at least there can be no doubt — I love Italy and hate Austria. And what is even less doubtful is that I shall not allow myself to be employed in machinations against the person of the sovereign. Have I spoken plainly enough?"

Guerra was dumbfounded. And his inner agitation threatened to show itself on the surface. He now became aware of the meaning of his agitation. The girl bewildered him. She made him weak. What had he, as a representative, a responsible person, to do with love? He must be hard — hard, confident and awe-inspiring!

"Contessina," he said very softly, "you have been if any-

thing too plain. You know that we are in a position to punish insubordination. I should be sorry to . . ."

She had stopped swinging in the hammock.

"Would you be sorry for me, Signore Guerra?"

Her face did not please him much now; it seemed so unmoved by his warning which surely could not be as insignificant as all that!

"Contessina," he said, and coughed, for he felt that his anger made his voice sound hoarse, "I beg you to grant me just one favour — don't use my name so often in conversation. Here I am the little Vicomte, and for the Party G.G. And this G.G., believe me, is certainly very young; but after all he does not hold his somewhat important position as the result of pure chance alone. In your own interests, Contessina, I beg you to regard these things as seriously as you can!"

She rose slowly and gravely, and coming towards him, stood quite close in front of him.

"These things, Vicomte," she said almost in a whisper, "have already inflicted very real and very grave consequences upon me — quite enough, in all conscience. I take it that you too are well aware of this. And do you imagine that I am poking fun at you and your mission?"

He could not help it. Her proximity made his breath come short and fast and his brow flush. He made a deprecating, almost desperate, gesture. The Countess, with her yellow eyes, continued:

"I take you so seriously, that I have already thought of the extremest possible developments. Do you know what such developments will be, Vicomte?"

"My God," groaned Guerra ignominiously, beside himself, and entirely losing command of his senses, "my God, I love you!"

"Of course," she whispered almost into his lips, "of course, that's the whole point. I shall separate G.G. from young Gasto Guerra, if things get too bad."

She did not kiss him as he expected. When he opened his

eyes, her face was already some distance away, and she was laughing. But her laugh was not an ugly one, it was not even scornful, it was on the contrary embarrassed. Yet it did not suit her. She was one of those whose faces are best grave, and which remain beautiful between all the gradations from calmness to anger. But she ought not to laugh, was the thought that passed through Guerra's bewildered brain.

3

Thus the storm clouds gathered. But what was even more serious, they did not burst, which though it might have been alarming would also have cleared the atmosphere. Matters remained at the stage of menacing possibilities. The Countess had shown the man, in his moment of weakness, the conflict she could bring about, and had then withdrawn quickly into herself again. And the change had been so rapid that Guerra was soon hardly able to distinguish between what had just happened and what he had just felt. And as his feelings endured very much longer than her recollection of the scene appeared to, or owing to the fact that they had only come into being at that instant and grew every moment more intense as she seemed to have no intention of becoming more familiar, he started on the simple and harrowing journey of the young man who is in love. At this juncture he was quite ready to betray both his position and his duty for his passion, and on one occasion he even made her understand this. But she pointed out to him very gravely that, apart from every other consideration, he must not degrade himself in her eyes. This gave him food for reflection. His soul suffered its first great crisis, and became stronger; it pressed more closely to the life of the world outside. His expression also grew deeper. He perceived that the life of every one is either an open or a hidden drama, and that it is no part of a fellow creature's natural activity to hide the open and disclose the hidden. He saw the tragedy of the old spinster, Checca, and endured her

boundless devotion without multiplying her blushes of shame or making her look more ridiculous. For he was beginning to know what a human soul felt like that knew no mercy but resignation. He even endeavoured, in his secret feeling of guilt towards the poor senses of this old maid, to be kind to her. And thus he succeeded for the first time in his life in being good to a fellow creature.

On checking a codified muster roll of the members of the Tuscan branch, he had come across Gioia, who figured in it as G.B. He was amazed at the duration and variety of this man's activities in the Party, and above all at the odd nature and gravity of the crime which lay like a yoke upon this human life.

"Why did you restore the old sinner G.B. to the active list, Checca?" he once asked the woman. She looked at him aghast, and showed signs of distress.

"Because . . . because . . ." she endeavoured to explain, "he had already been a liaison official in the centre of the city for a very long time. He is reliable. . . ."

"And what is he doing now?"

"He watches the principal entrance of the Palazzo Riccardi."

"Where the Prince Regent lives? This concerns me. Is it you who are responsible for having selected him, Checca?"

"I hold myself answerable for him, Signore."

Guerra looked at her for a moment. He could not understand the distress depicted on her features.

"All the same I cannot understand," he said, "why the Party keeps a criminal of this sort in tow for life. He ought to have been given a difficult job and then pushed off to America."

Checca pressed the palms of her hands together and looked down at the floor.

"For once I do not agree with you," she said softly. "He puts up with more from the Party than the Party does from him. He is not a bad man, he is a—poor penitent."

"You seem to know him very well, Checca?"

She gazed up at him and her poor soul peered through her eyes. Guerra grew pale.

"After all, I am the daughter in the case," she whispered.

That had been the moment when the beautiful will to do good came over him. He did not know that it was the touchstone for his experience. "I must now wipe off a debt," was all he said to himself. "She kissed my hand because I bewildered her in the most brutal fashion — much more brutal even than the Countess bewildered me. So I have much more reason to kiss her hand now."

On the following day he sauntered past the Palazzo Riccardi. In the recess close to the principal portico stood a crooked old beggar with a grey beard and blue spectacles; his right hand was strangely crippled, and his left, which held his hat, twitched oddly whenever anyone went by. From his place he could see every person and every vehicle that passed the gateway. Guerra threw a napoleon into his hat, and took up an unobtrusive position a little way off. At first Gioia did not notice the gold piece, then — suddenly, after casting a fleeting glance at it, the hat began to jerk in his hand. His lips moved, and with his hand he closed the sides of his shabby felt hat over the treasure. Nevertheless he did not take his eyes off the gateway.

Things developed in such a way as to force Guerra to rational action. The old Prince died not long after his rehabilitation, and the Contessina entered into the inheritance completing her transformation from little Labia into the great Countess, from a penniless emigrant into a Tuscan Feudal lady. Guerra felt he could not disturb this development by any demands of a political or private nature, and gladly satisfied himself that this was so, in order not to be overcome by his feelings for the lady. Thus he managed to retain his senses for his work, occupying himself with building up his branch, with whose members, for reasons of security, he never dealt direct, but only through the agency of Checca. And every

month he sent a courier with a few important communications concerning the ex-Regent to Paris. (The Prince was brooding over his questionable revolution, and as, moreover, he dreaded the Grand Duke, he was only too glad to keep quiet.)

After some time had elapsed, Princess Corleone invited Guerra to come to see her. She fixed the invitation for such a late hour at night, that it seemed to assume the nature less of a formal visit than a first indication of her confidence. He hastened to the Palace on the Ponte Santa Trinità, full of a feeling of joy which he knew to be foolish. On the steps he met a thin old man, whom he least of all expected to find in the house he was visiting — the notorious Baron Steiner; and his presence was all the more disquieting seeing that the Central Bureau had without further comment recommended the utmost caution as far as he was concerned. Checca alone professed to know that Steiner was the general agent of a foreign power, who for some obscure reason had subsidised the Neapolitan rising. As he descended the stairs slowly on his thin legs, the old man looked neither to right nor left. He had probably not even noticed the new arrival. Nevertheless the meeting was enough to destroy Guerra's joyful mood. It forced him once again to think things out, and as a member of the Party to distinguish between those who were for and those who were against him. How gladly would he have forgotten politics that evening!

The Princess received him in a somewhat bare reception room, whose French furniture was much too delicate and ornate for the large severe apartment. But the Countess herself looked not a whit less beautiful than Guerra expected. She was friendly, almost familiar.

"I am pleased with you, Gasto. I set great store by men who are controlled and therefore prudent."

"I am not so pleased with myself," Guerra confessed; "but that is neither here nor there."

"For Heaven's sake don't lose patience," she said with a smile. "We shall get together some day yet."

"What do you mean by that, Principessa?"

"I mean it quite honestly, my friend," she rejoined, showing her teeth. "Today," she continued after a moment's pause, "it is a question of my marriage."

Guerra immediately raised his head, and looked at her. Her face wore the gravity of expression he knew so well. Moreover, she was not in the habit of joking about herself. He shrugged his shoulders helplessly and she proceeded to explain.

"It is a question of marriage with a person of high rank with strong political interests. A somewhat dilapidated dynast with a somewhat obscure crown. Prince George Y."

"Indeed!" said Guerra sadly. The Countess leant towards him, took his head between her hands and kissed him gently on the brow.

"Where is the policy of the Central Bureau now?" she enquired with a smile. "For the present, *carino,* it is much more important to me than melancholy."

Guerra was not stirred by her touch, for he knew how far she was thrusting him from her.

"Politics have gone downstairs with the Baronissimo," he replied with a sullen expression. She laughed.

"Good! Quite right, Vicomtissime! So you saw him? Yes, he is the marriage-broker, in addition to all sorts of other things. But, take my advice, Gasto, and call politics back. I'll look after them better than he does. Believe me, with him one never knows what pocket they may vanish into, and in what state they may re-appear."

Guerra made an agonised gesture.

"Will you please tell me, Principessa, why you have summoned G.G.?" he asked with a smile which was not altogether successful.

"Certainly," she said gaily. "It is in connection with high politics, which make me feel rather giddy. I am going to try to secure the Grand Duke's support and through him the support of the Cabinet of Vienna for the Pretender. This would be enough to procure for him, a Catholic prince, some kind of small Italian sovereignty — Lucca, for instance. In

short, the Independence Movement would then know where the focus of Free Italy and where the ancestress of the future dynasty are to be found. I am more devoted to the Cause than that flabby ex-Regent of Piedmont, and my blood is not inferior to his."

Guerra stared at her aghast.

"Pardon me, Princess," he said at last, "but that is madness!"

She was not angry.

"Possibly," she said thoughtfully, "but the last fifteen years have seen much greater madness become reality. In a few weeks I will let you know whether it is worth while to plead in favour of the plan with the Central Bureau. It all depends on whether . . ."

She stopped and pursed her lips, as if she ought not to say any more. An oppressive silence followed. Suddenly Guerra groaned.

"Gasto," she enquired softly, "is it so very hard?"

He stretched his fingers and then clenched his fist, and looked towards the fireplace where a small fire was burning. At last he said fairly calmly, though his voice was a little bit hoarse:

"You already know, of course, Princess, what — what price the sovereign will demand for his action — and is entitled to receive?"

"Of course I do, Gasto," she replied calmly. He looked at her; he was very pale.

"Maria," he gasped, "you surely haven't brought me here this evening to obtain my permission to become the Grand Duke's mistress? Why do you already torment me with the prospect? Why did you tell me anything about it? What has it all got to do with me?"

"I thought, Gasto," she rejoined gravely, shrugging her shoulders as if in regret, "you might guess why. In that case you must leave Florence. It would be better for us both."

Guerra sat perfectly still and made no reply. The Countess sent him home. She was uneasy at his distress and her own agitation.

In the days that followed, he was unusally reserved and grave. Checca at all events noticed it. He had Prince George watched, discovered his way of living, and concluded from the medicines which the Pretender's valet was in the habit of ordering at a certain chemist's, that the state of the master's health must be deplorable. He communicated the result of his observations in a formal letter to the Princess, but got no reply. Nevertheless, he sent a favourable report concerning the Prince's person to the Central Bureau. The Countess's invitation to her wedding at the Cathedral, and to the wedding banquet, offended him somewhat, as he himself admitted, though he did not quite know why. He excused himself courteously on the plea that he had to go away for a little while, and, as a matter of fact, he did spend a few days at Vallombrosa, a beautifully situated mountain resort to the northeast of the city. When he returned he found an urgent note from the Princess, and, that same evening, he hastened to see her, almost overwhelmned by the speed with which events had moved.

The Princess was alone and extremely agitated. Even the somewhat rigid mould of her features seemed to have been disturbed by her experiences. She looked a little older.

"The Grand Duke has refused to give any support whatsoever to the plan," she said.

"Well?" Guerra enquired timidly, terrified by his own hopes. The Princess made an unusual, girlishly shy movement with her shoulder.

"And in spite of it all, Gasto — possibly on that very account," she said softly, "it seems to me that I love his clean soul. We can learn a few things from him, *amico.*"

Guerra had stood up. "And what if I don't go, after all?" he said, and his face was again for the last time the burning face of the crushed schoolboy. "What if I don't go? Surely

there are other things at stake for me? Don't take my person so seriously, Maria . . ."

"Oh," she interrupted, with an angry expression on her lips, "that was pitiful."

Guerra strode silently towards the door.

"Gasto," she cried, summoning him back, and he halted. "Gasto! It may be a piece of self-sacrifice. But let that be! For the moment I want peace. Do you understand me. Gasto?"

"No," he said harshly, "for I have not yet disturbed you."

She looked at him and gently shook her head.

"Now I should like to know, Gasto," she enquired slowly, "whether you are lying out of thoughtlessness or from malice prepense."

"My God," he groaned, "Maria! When must I go away?"

The Princess did not answer at once, but went up to him and kissed him. Then she said:

"Oh Gasto, you cannot imagine how simple such things can be. So simple that I wished to leave them unsaid. We must now be able to rely upon each other in quite a different way, Gasto. We should be glad, my friend, that we are both still young, and yet shall not be untrue to the idea. Let us call it the idea, Gasto."

On the following morning very early, the Ambassador's *chasseur* wakened him. Half an hour later, still quite bewildered by the summons, he was surprised to find the old diplomat in the library of the Embassy clad in a fantastically bright Mandarin's cloak which he was wearing as a dressing-gown.

"My dear Vicomte," he said with his customary cheerfulness, "please forgive the unconventionality of the hour and of my attire. But, just imagine, a certain Gasto Guerra, one of the leaders of the *Carbonari,* has been traced by the Tuscan police to Florence, and is to be arrested in the course of the morning in the very hotel in which you are staying. If you

have to go at once, *cher ami,* let me *visé* your passport and place the post horses of the Embassy at your disposal."

At seven o'clock on that misty September morning, Guerra already had the Porta al Prato behind him, and was riding accompanied by a French courier into the mountains, westward towards Pistoia. At midday they crossed the frontier of Tuscany. In the evening they were in Bologna. From there he sent a messenger to Checca, with a few orders relating to the organisation, and entrusting her with the despatch of all future correspondence between him and the Princess Labia-Corleone.

A week later he was in Paris. This time he was not exactly acclaimed, though it is true he was not suspected. His project with regard to Prince George was regarded by his superiors as a mistake. And it was only with great difficulty that he succeeded in preventing Princess Corleone from being placed on the list of suspects. He expatiated in vague and obscure terms about the part she was to play in the future, and passed through the most critical period from the standpoint of his credit with the Party. He was sent to Milan on a very dangerous mission. The bracing air of political life in that city restored his enthusiasm, the fact that he had as his opponent the elaborate Austrian police system stimulated him, while he was shaken by the tragedy of the great patriots of Lombardy. He worked assiduously, cautiously and for the most part clandestinely. In order, as far as possible, to be left in peace by the authorities, he became a partner in a lawyer's office, and, owing to the necessity of showing his diplomas, was obliged, willy nilly, to sign papers for the firm in his real name; and as his revolutionary past, up to the end of the Florentine episode, had been anonymous, this answered for a while. He kept in regular communication with the Princess. Her letters were friendly but constrained as was her wont. His letters were temperate and businesslike, at first somewhat stiff and formal, and continuing so from sheer habit. It was not apparent from the correspondence that the two were in love.

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She, for her part, seemed to be content with her sovereign's splendid attachment, while Guerra indulged in all manner of somewhat unscrupulous adventures. When Confalioneri was sentenced to death, the Princess suddenly asked to be given active work to do for the Party. Guerra heard through Checca that no schemes of a provocative nature lay behind this wish, which was undoubtedly due to her state of deep dissatisfaction. Their relationship now became partly official. Owing to the large funds which she placed at the disposal of the Tuscan branch, Guerra did not meet with much difficulty in obtaining the consent of the Central Bureau to her co-operation. Moreover she was not initiated into the real aims of the Party, but treated more as a financier and an honorary member. After Guerra's flight from Milan, and his dark years in Paris and as a travelling Party-organiser, she managed to obtain leave for him to settle down in Florence as an advocate. When they saw each other again after seven years of separation, they felt the disappointment which the estrangement of long absence entails. Guerra, who, as leader of the harmless Tuscan branch of the party, had also assumed the command of all the groups of Carbonari in Central Italy, had, owing to his long and extraordinary association with danger, developed into a man of iron nerve, and the Princess was now a somewhat overbearing woman of thirty. His greatest pleasure was derived, not from meeting her again, but from seeing his sister Maddalena, now a young woman of twenty-one, full of wondrous charm and secret savagery. She was living with an aunt in Livorno. He went to see her, and three days after his return, she came to Florence and remained with him.

Checca now looked an old woman. Her sallow cheeks no longer flushed when she saw him, and her zeal for the cause satisfied every craving of her heart. She cleaned his offices and pointed out the police spies who soon took up their position.

"Is Gioia still alive?" he asked her on the very first day. Looking away, she answered quietly:

"He must live as long as I live."

THE MAGIC HOOD OF NIGHT

I

The bright light of the moon made Guerra's lantern quite unnecessary. The shadows of the cypresses behind the park of Isola stretched across the main road as clearly defined as though it were daylight. He wished it were a darker night, and kept close up to the wall. And yet all the way from Majano he had not met a soul. It was very quiet, only the bark of a dog could be heard from time to time in the distance. The silvery night hung solemnly between the motionless trees.

An iron door, hardly as high as his head, which would have been passed by unnoticed by the uninitiated, was standing ajar in the black mass of the wall. Guerra pushed it open, and let it close with a snap behind him. A few paces away, in the garden, was a half ruined hut. Behind an oleander, close to the narrow steps leading up to the hut, a man stood stiffly waiting.

"Renzo!" Guerra cried under his breath, and halted. The man stepped forward. The path was flecked with patches of light from the moon through the trees above. In any case it was light enough to recognise anybody.

"Here, Signore," said Maddii, the printer. Guerra held out a friendly hand.

"Are they all there?" he asked.

"Yes."

They went into the hut. The door was a strong one and in good condition. The outside of the building was apparently more dilapidated than the inside. The ground floor in particular, which the two now entered, had windows that could be

locked quite fast, and were fitted with heavy iron shutters. Thus it was only when they were inside the passage that they saw that one of the rooms was lighted up.

"Has the Princess got visitors this evening?" Guerra enquired, and remained standing outside the door of the room.

"No," Maddii replied, "only your sister."

"Has anyone been to see her today, Renzo?"

"Only Baron Steiner, as usual to lunch. He drove back to the city about two o'clock. Then I made the necessary announcement."

"And what about this afternoon? Did a priest come by any chance?"

Maddii looked at him in astonishment.

"A priest, Signore? Certainly not! No visitor whatever, at least not through the principal entrance which I had in my charge."

"Good, Renzo. But you will have to remain a few days longer in Settignano and keep a sharp look out."

Guerra then opened the door. About ten men, who had been conversing in low tones, sprang to their feet in respectful silence. Most of them were young, district leaders from Florence and liaison agents from the minor stations of Livorno, Pistoia, Volterra and Siena, among them the journalist Scaleterra. Guerra greeted them in a friendly manner, and shook each of them by the hand. Then turning once more to Maddii, who had remained modestly standing at the door, he said:

"It would be best, Renzo, if you were to remain on watch outside. We must exercise the greatest caution. Besides, as far as you are concerned, you have your orders."

Maddii left the room silently and softly closed the door.

"Signori," said Guerra calmly, "you know things have gone thus far. The Grand Duke has left Vienna and is travelling across Venetia. Today is the tenth of October. As far as we can tell, the Grand Duke will reach Modena on the fifteenth of October, to visit the Duke. Presumably, therefore,

our brothers in Modena will rise in revolt on the fifteenth of October, at a signal consisting of two shots which will not be fired into the air, I can assure you. Presumably, on the seventeenth our brothers in Bologna will rise in revolt at the same time as we do."

He was silent and looked at the men, who seemed to be but faintly stirred by the news. Are their brains dull, thought Guerra somewhat distressed, or are they full of qualms? Then he noticed a pair of calm, intelligent eyes turned towards him. Suddenly dropping his glance, he murmured to himself, "That fellow, Scaleterra, is not dull; he sees things clearly. He evidently intends to oppose me again."

"To rise in revolt," said the journalist quietly, with a slight drawl, "to rise in revolt, Brother G.G., is not to be victorious."

"Certainly not," Guerra rejoined scornfully, "but we cannot possibly begin by my appointing you Minister of Education."

Scaleterra shrugged his shoulders and was silent. Guerra then began to give each of the officials his orders. He spoke coldly and simple, endeavouring by means of sober orders and unhesitating language to combat the timidity that was in the air, and which he imagined he was responsible for spreading. The arming of the Tuscan branch had been completed for some time, thanks to the 5,000 French muskets and pistols which Corsican smugglers had landed near Piombino. Guerra made a brief reference to this in the hope of inspiring confidence by a reminder of this last happy event in the affairs of the Party. He then turned to the most important item on the agenda for the evening, which was to instruct the individual urban groups regarding their battle tactics and the objective of their attack. His orders were clear and revealed much thought, and a very accurate knowledge of the military situation. The principal points of attack were the Palazzo Vecchio, the headquarters of the Government, the Ministry of War, the General Staff and the Commandant of the City, then the barracks of the two infantry regiments near

Belvedere, the Guardia Nobile in the Via dei Guicciardini, which protected the Palazzo Pitti, the quarters of the Artillery battalion in the Fortezzo da Basso, and of the squadron of Dragoons in the Corso dei Tintori.

"Besides, which," he concluded suddenly, showing signs of nervousness, "it is to be hoped that certain free companies composed of foreign recruits, who have been attracted by our propaganda, will either remain neutral or come over to our side."

"There is no hope of that," Scaleterra declared calmly. "Our propaganda is much too intellectual, because it is the work of literary men and students; and it has certainly opened the door to no barracks. Moreover, there is no detachment of troops without German non-commissioned officers. And they will fire on us; you can rely upon that!"

Guerra looked angrily at him. He knew all this as well as Scaleterra did. Damn the fellow, he also knew why he had not referred to these facts, and many other things besides. Had it become impossible to rely on the discipline of his subordinate leaders?

"*Amico,*" he said softly but firmly, "please be good enough to keep your opinions to yourself until you are asked for them. I too will not hope that the obstructiveness which you do not attempt to conceal is intended to overstep these permissible limits."

The journalist had a bumpy and rather crooked nose, which grew red when he was excited and the nostrils of which vibrated incessantly. Guerra saw this, and was aware that the fellow would not allow himself to be cowed, but would oppose him with unfortunate results. He pursed his lips uneasily.

"With all due respect to you, Brother G.G.," Scaleterra began in guttural tones, "and with all due subordination, we are now holding something in the nature of a council of war, at which expression of opinion and questions ought to be allowed. Such a question as this, for instance: do you expect with the breech-loaders that Monsieur Lafayette has discarded

to demolish not only the walls of the Fortessa da Basso but also the heavy guns of the artillery inside?"

Guerra went white with rage, but he controlled himself.

"Yes, my dearest fellow," he said drily, "and my patience would even allow you to put the other question, the main question, which is apparently already hanging on your lips."

"Thank you," Scaleterra rejoined, dilating his nostrils. "I avail myself of your kind permission. I confess that in this case I do not understand the Central Bureau's policy in regard to us. Why does it not admit that the whole affair only boils down to an attempt on the life of the Grand Duke, and the death for propaganda purposes, of a few hundred Tuscan patriots, who will serve to fertilize the soil for revolutionary harvests to be gathered at a much later date? For even if the attempt on the Grand Duke's life succeeds, it will only create confusion; it will not bring about a revolution. Politically the Grand Duchy of Tuscany is the most firmly constructed state in all Italy. In about three hours the few hundred dead will have been collected, and then things will go on just the same as before."

As if amused by what he had heard, Guerra brought his fists down heavily on the table.

"Bravo!" he cried, forcing himself to smile, "all very fine, and difficult to refute! But I do not belong to the Central Bureau, but probably to the very patriots who will die for the sake of propaganda. Because, to be quite plain, the moment I receive the signal from the northern frontier, I shall myself give the 'Piazza' detachment its marching orders, and lead them to the Palazzo Vecchio. As for you, my friend, I will allow you to remain at the editorial office, and save yourself for drawing up the bulletin of victory. And if events should prove this to be premature, you can tear it up again!"

Scaleterra was no fool, and gathered from his leader's bitter scorn, that his thrust had gone home, nay more, that Guerra, in his heart of hearts, was of much the same opinion as himself. Strange to say, this satisfied him; for his opposition, though

peculiar, was in no way unworthy of a colleague. It was also clear to him that Guerra's attitude of dissimulation had been tactically necessary, that his position, in fact, appeared to be far from simple. With a wave of his hand, which as far as the others were concerned, was a sufficient excuse for the sharpness of his words, he replied:

"That is not particularly witty on your part, Brother G.G.; it is also unbusinesslike. My individual person has nothing whatever to do with the subject we are debating. Naturally I shall find myself where my men are. And in this room tonight, I represent the 'Piazza' detachment. I also fully recognise that my objection cannot of course stand, as against the decisions of the Central Bureau, which sees things from a higher angle. But allow me to put one last question. Suppose the two shots fired in Modena should miss their aim, or suppose that, by some turn of fate, they should never be fired at all — what then?"

Guerra did not answer directly. He seemed exhausted and uneasy, and looked at the clock.

"Miss their aim," he replied at last in a tired voice, "that is not very likely. For they are not limited to two shots. Neither is anything likely to occur to prevent the attempt. But, in order to answer your question, I may say, that in the case you suppose, we should remain inactive."

The journalist nodded. Guerra continued to give out his instructions, which now dealt with the country districts and the provincial towns. The liaison agents monotonously repeated their orders. And then silence reigned. Guerra wondered what he could say. The journalist looked at him once more, as if he were trying to guess the secret thoughts behind his brow. Suddenly he asked very softly:

"And what about the Princess?"

Guerra leapt to his feet. His expression was not angry, it was merely helpless. His voice was louder than it had been the whole evening.

"I do not understand that question."

2

The Princess was already tired. Madda, moreover, had been a somewhat tiresome and taciturn guest that day. And Maria Corleone was possessed of that fine tact which prevented her from enquiring about anything which concerned Madda's brother, and which he alone was entitled to say or to leave unsaid. Even two hours previously, when the agitated girl had seemed disposed to answer her questions, she had refrained from asking much. Events crouched behind the thin wall of silence!

The Princess had for some time been aware that active steps were in preparation, and her heart had been uneasy. She began to suspect that her somewhat smug and irresponsible position, for which she was secretly very grateful to Guerra — and the fact that she was not forced either to know, see, or hear too much about the revolutionary machine at her elbow — could not last very much longer. She had grown more indolent in spirit than in body. She liked life as it was. Her passive membership of the Independence Movement satisfied all her longings, particularly as by means of the funds she provided, she played a sufficiently important part, and was able to be useful to Guerra in many ways. Moreover, she had come to regard Tuscany as a sort of neutral zone, which certainly had its Platonic value as far as the idea of a United Italy was concerned, but which could not be regarded as a possible scene of struggle and bloodshed. With this view of things she may have absolved herself even in connection with the Grand Duke. But the July Revolution whose thunderbolts shattered her fragile theory, suddenly burst out. She dreaded events which might alter her way of life and deliver her up to the judgment of her harassed conscience. Never had she felt so relieved by the sovereign's departure on his journey as she was at this juncture. On the other hand, Guerra, who lived close by, in Fiesole, made all the greater claim upon her. During the first few days she had to drive over once or

twice, to Borgunto, which she thought stank horribly of the poor, and then she was called upon to instal a secret meeting place in her own grounds, as Florence had become too hot for others besides the leader, Guerra. Meetings between Guerra and his officials, in the little hut in the Isola grounds, were not exactly frequent, nor was the Princess taken very deeply into their confidence, which pleased her only too well. But it no longer required old Baron Steiner's grave warning to make her understand the gravity of her position. Guerra's activities were obvious, and her anxiety regarding developments increased as they neared her person, though they did not reach her sphere of influence. Even that day, when Steiner was lunching with her, she did not know that once again that evening she would be called upon to provide shelter for invisible and dangerous visitors. Possibly the old man, that strange mentor and arbiter of her destiny, had known better; for he had continued the confession she had never solicited from him and told her of the part he had played in the Neapolitan rising. It had been an evil game — money for the insurgents and money for the forces of reaction. The Princess shook her head.

"Yes," Steiner said with a smile, "the great Power in question cares neither for France nor for England. Obviously it cares only for itself, and is therefore intensely interested in the troubles and the Achilles' heels of its possible rivals."

"No, Baron," she replied disconsolately, "you insist on misunderstanding me. I am no longer interested in that Age, with its troubles and its heels of Achilles, and neither are you —I know that perfectly well. You have shown a fondness for analogies of late, Steiner; but, after the semi-admission I made to you not long ago, you do not need them any longer."

"I am not so sure of that, *Altezza,*" he had retorted gravely. "A semi-admission may carry less weight than a bold analogy. And *my* circle becomes completely closed when I tell you that my connection with the central Bureau of the Independence Party in Paris, although on a different footing, it is true, is at all events older than that of say, Gasto Guerra."

Tears of helplessness and fear came into the eyes of the agitated woman. Fate seemed to be turning against her on every side, and was already blocking avenues which she thought were still free.

"Don't say another word!" she begged, sitting upright and motionless in her arm-chair. And Steiner was moved by the spectacle of rigid woe she presented.

"Very well, my child," he said with unusual gentleness, uttering the first intimate words of their long friendship, "I will say no more."

Maria Corleone seized his thin hands, as if she wished to hold them fast, and whispered hurriedly:

"I assure you I know nothing, Steiner! They tell me nothing — on my honour they don't . . ."

He stroked her fingers tenderly.

"I believe you, Maria," he said softly, "but it is possible you might soon discover everything, and then you might not know what to do. There are some situations, particularly for women who have dared to go too far with their feelings — there are some situations, *Altezza,* which seem to bring one to the very brink of life. I should be glad in that case — forgive the hint, Maria — aye, I should be glad in that case, to know a little more. I enjoy no advantage over you, except my extra forty years of life; but you are full of innumerable and sometimes astonishing views about existence."

Thereupon he left her, and she sat lost in thought. After a while she recovered her composure a little. Then a servant entered with a letter, which a man had handed to the porter. It contained the usual message — the brief request for the carriage to be sent at six o'clock to the cross roads at the foot of Monte Ceceri. Maddalena Guerra used to come first by herself, at a time which none of the Princess' friends were likely to choose, to make arrangements for the evening's meeting, and to see that neither the Princess nor her servants came into touch with the officials. As the staff at Isola was not large, and sometimes for days not even a gardener would stray into that remote part of the park in which the meeting place was

situated, she did not experience much difficulty. It was she, moreover, who at a given time, opened the little door in the wall. Then she was relieved by Maddii, the printer, who was responsible for keeping watch on the little hut until the arrival of the last member of the party, Guerra himself; while Madda, who never attended any of the meetings, usually returned to the Princess.

This was the usual routine. But on this occasion, the time for the carriage to be ready was a little earlier. The Princess, who was expecting something out of the ordinary, interpreted this trivial change as a proof that the hour had struck. When Maddalena arrived she did not notice any signs of unusual excitement in her. The child had the same charming face, with its faint little signs of cruelty in the corners of the mouth. But Maria Corleone's senses were, on this occasion, strained to the utmost degree of sharpness, and she perceived that her friend's customary friendliness was something of a mask, behind which lurked a whole world of strange harsh thoughts, while she seemed to be not quite satisfied with her strategy, necessary though it probably was. For the expression in her eyes was frequently sadder than the occasion seemed to warrant.

The Princess loved the girl with that faint physical attraction which mature women often feel for the feminine charms of those who are younger by a decade and whose advance through the next ten years is apt to fill their elders with melancholy tinged with a certain hostility. Moreover, there was the disconcerting fact which, while it attracted her to the girl, also aroused a sense of rivalry, that she was Guerra's sister, and lived in complete human and intellectual harmony with him. Guerra too had come to puzzle her as much as a man as he did as a politician. She hardly dared to acknowledge to herself that she loved him not a whit less today than she had done eight years previously. She now knew that the disappointment she had felt on seeing him again after the long separation had been different from his. He had been disap-

pointed by the woman — and with the brutality of a man, he had already forgotten their long years of love, or had at least closed the door of the past behind him. But she was much too much of a woman to be disappointed by the person of her beloved. She had expected love, and had met only with criticism. She stood too high and was too proud to answer him with frank hatred as a lesser woman who had been disillusioned would have done, and had contented herself with that relationship of calm friendship which she had urged him to adopt at the beginning of their connection. And, truth to tell, she possessed the rare magnanimity not to forget how much he had suffered at that time, and to regard her lot as the just balance of fate. Nevertheless in her heart of hearts the uncertainty had arisen, which now threatened to destroy her peace of mind. Madda's youthful charm, which now emerged beside her brother and followed him step by step with the profound harmony of a common blood-stream, delighted her on the surface, but wounded her in secret. She was ashamed of her senseless jealousy and heaped proofs of friendship upon the girl. But in that part of her being which was turned towards Guerra, there remained a faint echo of pain behind the friendly words and deeds with which she met both him and his sister.

Thus behind the relationship of the two women lurked a dark background which neither of them had any wish to explore. For apart from Madda's admiration of the Princess and her girlish subordination to the latter's beautiful womanliness, there was a dangerous little area of independence, a subterranean closely guarded sphere which she held sacrosanct from the first, and which was certainly a source of torment to her friend. And of this she seemed to be quite unconscious, behaving as though she were younger than her years, and proceeding to torture the Princess quite innocently, with the charming cruelty of a child. She let her suspect what the secret was that lay hidden in her soul. She never spoke to the Princess of her passion for her brother, she only hinted at it.

She appeared not to know of the personal relations that had existed, and perhaps still existed, between Guerra and Maria Corleone. But she never hesitated to show how much more closely she was associated with her brother's life and work than anyone else. The Princess, for her part, did not betray the fact that, to her, the man had a very different interest from his calling, and respected Madda's sanctuary. And today, for the first time, the girl felt grateful to her for this attitude, as she strove in a sisterly way to conceal the fate that was overtaking him.

At first Madda was somewhat absent-minded, for she did not know how to carry out her particular mission, without upsetting Maria's nerves, which were to undergo a severe test that very evening. She kissed the Princess. She thought her more beautiful than ever, and stroked her bare arms. She knew the effect of her physical contact on the older woman, and exploiting it, scrutinised her features. Maria Corleone remained friendly, quiet and a little reserved.

"You have come earlier than usual today, haven't you, Madda?" she enquired carelessly. The girl looked at her and nodded — "She suspects something," she thought, and grew sad.

"Gasto sent me earlier than usual, in order to . . . but I hope I haven't disturbed you, Maria, or driven any visitors away?"

The Princess gave a cryptic smile.

"Oh no, *chérie,*" she replied, "I only had Steiner to lunch today as usual. Otherwise nobody has been here — if that is what you want to know."

Madda blushed and bowed her head. Today she was lacking in resource and assurance. Today she was not equal to her task.

"It all sounded different from what I meant, Maria," she said in pained equivocal tones, "but I can't help it!"

Maria Corleone stroked her hair, and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Just tell me quietly what you have to tell me, Madda. I am not so sensitive or unsuspecting as you perhaps imagine."

The girl looked up astonished. What was the meaning of that? she asked herself. Was it a faint warning not to draw the bow too tight?

"Do you know Abbot Vacca, Princess? Lionello Vacca, a very tall, very fat man?"

Maria thought a moment and then replied that she did not. The girl waited to see whether she would ask the reason of the enquiry. But the Princess asked no questions, and pursed her lips haughtily. Madda's voice now sounded a little irritable.

"Would you be able, Princess, through the Cardinal Archbishop, to procure the removal of a priest who is objectionable, that is to say, dangerous to us?"

Maria looked up astonished.

"No," she rejoined, "how could I do that?"

Madda frowned and the two little fiendish lumps formed above her nose.

"Not even if he were dangerous to you, Maria?"

The Princess' shoulders twitched nervously, but she replied in terms of calm reproach:

"But, my dear child, of course not, not even in that case. Besides, I did not regard myself as excluded, when you said 'to us.'"

"Oh Maria!" Madda exclaimed in confusion, "I am terribly tactless today." And she made a gesture as if she were shaking something off, and then suddenly speaking with great frankness, she continued: "My position is often too difficult for me. When I am nervous, I really don't know whether I am worse as a friend or as an official of the Party. And I am nervous today. The abbot is an intimate friend of Caminer, and seems to be on the right track."

And she described the scene between Vacca and Gioia, the beggar. The Princess listened gravely. Looking down to the floor, she turned her toes restlessly from side to side.

"Yes," she said calmly, after a while, "I must be prepared for things of that sort. But for the moment I trust any direct action on the part of the police against me will be prevented."

"By whom?" Madda enquired imprudently. The Princess raised her brows a little. She too had areas in her soul that lay concealed from the light.

"Well," she said, apparently somewhat distressed, "by the sovereign of course."

Madda pursed her lips and quickly put her hands to her temples as she perceived that a dreadful thought was making the Princess' eyes glow glassily.

"I've got a headache today," she said; and getting up she went over to the window in order to be able to turn her back on her companion. "It has been as hot as a day in August."

"Yes," said the Princess, and they were silent for a while. The girl drew in the mild evening air audibly, and stretched her arms out of the window, humming to herself.

"If," she said all of a sudden, turning round, "the abbot should come here, no matter on what pretext, Princess, you will receive him calmly, won't you, and behave quite naturally and indifferently towards him?"

"Very well," Maria replied. "Has any other decision been reached with regard to this man, which concerns me?"

"No," said Madda, and a moment later she went off into the park in order to open the little door in the eastern wall.

The Princess stepped out on to the terrace. The night lay peaceful in the silvery light of the moon. All seemed well with the world, because all was quiet. Man, his handiwork and his deeds, were magically transfigured by the divine pride of the night. Far away below the city looked like a mirrored reflection of the starry heavens above, soft points of light in the black velvet void. Close by, looming tall and gigantic, freed from their daylight melancholy, towered the unearthly silhouettes of the cypresses, black candles of stillness, mystically encircled by the moonlight as by girdles of silver. Then, with

a slight turn of her head, she could see a lonely pine, raising its crest aloft in the world, and catching the white rays of the night like rain. "All this is much too beautiful," she thought, and turned away. "It makes me feel much weaker than I am already."

Madda returned. Her face had not yet lost the sharp lines drawn by duty accomplished. The two women sat down to a meal which was short and silent.

"You don't seem hungry either, Madda," the Princess observed. The girl shook her head and looked attentively at her hostess.

"After all, I am not such a very bad friend," she said, trying to joke. Her hostess remained grave.

"You are so young," she said, "and yet I do not know anyone who could be a more faithful comrade to him."

Madda stared at the tablecloth.

"You are not referring to our friendship now, are you?"

"No, Madda."

"Why did you say comrade then, and not sister?"

The elder woman smiled furtively.

"Tonight I regard the attitude of comrade as more beautiful than that of sister. That's why I said it. You are certainly more than a sister."

"Why?" the girl enquired almost angrily. She squeezed her fingers into her palms as if she wished to prevent herself from saying more. Then she added in low hurried tones, "I know of only one relationship higher than that of a sister — the relationship of sweetheart."

The Princess closed her eyes for a moment and was conscious of a wild beating in her temples.

"As for that . . ." she said, almost inaudibly, "I cannot understand that, because I am not a sister."

The girl sat lost in thought. Then leaning slightly across the table, she seized the elder woman's hand.

"Maria," she said softly, "what is it you want to find out about me tonight?"

This showed such an unexpected and incomprehensible readiness to unburden her heart, that the Princess raised her hand almost in horror. "How deep her pity must be!" she thought.

"Nothing," she murmured, "Madda, nothing! unless it is what you just hinted to me — the capacity for sacrifice."

Suddenly the girl gave a short tearless sob. The Princess looked at her enquiringly and pressed her hand.

"It is not very far off either," said the girl bluntly, in order to stifle her emotions. "There is only one sacred kind of sacrifice. And that is love. And when this love . . . when this sacrifice is not possible, one easily becomes blasphemous, one easily throws oneself to the dogs — as an indirect sacrifice, for an idea . . . or whatever else you like!"

"My God!" groaned the Princess. "I shall once again have to learn how terrible life can be!"

Madda brought her fist down wildly on the table.

"It can be so terrible, Maria! So unutterably terrible!"

The Princess fell back, thoroughly alarmed.

"In God's name, child," she cried, "what is the matter with you?"

The girl pressed her fists to her head and laughed a silent, ghastly laugh.

"Child . . . child . . ." she muttered. "This child has to use her body as a lure, a bait . . . yes, she has . . . when her brother wishes her to . . . or when the Cause does, for that sounds better . . ."

The Princess stood up, and her face was deathly white.

"Is that true, Madda — why do you tell me about it?"

The girl suddenly became calm, almost uncanny in her rigidity of bearing.

"I don't know," she replied curtly. "Perhaps it is not true after all."

The Princess said nothing. She merely drew her shawl more closely about her shoulders as if she were cold.

"Shall I shut the window?" Madda enquired. The Princess seemed unable to speak for a moment. Then she suddenly started out of her reverie.

"No, no, thank you! — we might not hear it."

The hours crawled slowly by. It was still very quiet. The only sound that broke the stillness from time to time was the feeble, short rasping chirp of the cicada. The open window faced the eastern side of the grounds. The men who were now doing their secret work there were not betrayed by the night. But their spirits were beating in the pulses of the women, between whom there was no longer any room for words. They sat silently side by side, almost embarrassed.

"It is taking a long time today," observed Madda at last. The Princess nodded. She was already tired. Her state of tension had abated, although she knew that the time had not yet come. Her head dropped forward. She seemed to have fallen asleep and Madda did not disturb her.

Suddenly in the distance was heard a man's fine mellow voice, beginning to sing the simple rollicking song which the peasants of the Chianti valley sing at the time of the wine harvest.

"At last!" cried Madda and stood up. Without a sound the Princess also arose.

"There's no need for any light tonight," she said. And the two women left the house and sauntered through the park arm in arm. When they had gone far enough for there to be no chance of meeting any of the servants, they let go of each other with an almost simultaneous movement, and stepped out more briskly. Madda was leading. The Princess kept close behind her. Renzo's voice, which had given the sign that the officials had left Isola, had long since died away. Their footsteps rang unconscionably loud in their ears.

Guerra was standing in front of the hut door waiting for them.

"Good evening," said the Princess softly, and he kissed her hand.

"Good evening, Maria," he replied, calmly returning her greeting. "It lasted very late tonight. Forgive me!"

She could not see his face properly. He was already on the steps leading them into the hut. The air of the unventilated room was stale and stuffy. "It stinks of conspiracies," thought the Princess, smiling involuntarily. But as she had her lace handkerchief to her mouth, he had probably not noticed anything.

She examined his face. He looked old and exhausted. Nevertheless he did not seem to be either uneasy or weighed down by any momentous decision. "Perhaps the whole thing was only a false alarm," she thought, "and a distressing test of reliability."

They sat down at the bare brown table. Guerra looked at its scarred surface thoughtfully. Madda dropped her chin lightly on her folded hands and closed her eyes.

"It is already late," began Guerra in low tones, "I must cut out all preambles, even at the risk of appearing extremely unexpected."

"That in itself is as good as a preamble, Gasto," said the Princess softly. He raised his eyes towards her, those beautiful, somewhat mistrustful eyes, which could be either grey, green or blue, and whose lids quivered for the moment.

"Yes, Maria," he began, with a vague, somewhat embarrassed gesture, "when I implore you to go as soon as possible, perhaps even tomorrow morning — to leave Florence and go for a while to Rome, together with the Prince, on my honour, it is the friend that speaks and not the member of a Party."

The Princess passed a hand across her brow and looked at Madda, who had opened her eyes, and was staring as it were apathetically into the darkest corner of the room.

"I readily believe you, Gasto," the Princess replied, "but I cannot do so without asking you one or two questions. And, as you know, I also have certain obligations and duties . . ."

At these words Guerra pursed his lips, reminding her of

his sister, into whose face the same thought had brought a similar expression. And once more qualms wrapped her about as in a flame.

"Yes, yes," said Guerra with a nod, "ask as many questions as you like."

"My God!" she cried suddenly, in such piercing tones that both brother and sister leapt to their feet and stared open-eyed. "Well listen, I want to be clear about everything! I want the truth! I may or may not be able to bear it; but that will be my affair!"

Brother and sister looked at each other. Madda's lips began to shape as if to express a wish. Guerra said tenderly:

"Maria, you must not hurry to make a decision which may be hard on all of us, possibly fatal. I acknowledge I had thought of concealing something from you. I thought it necessary for the sake of our long friendship. But possibly that is the wrong point of view. Perhaps it is even possible that Fate stands behind you."

With a look of horror on her face, Madda raised her hand, as if she wished to ward off or intercept something. Maria Corleone said:

"I don't understand you even now, Gasto."

Guerra's face was full of a will that was bright and clear. It seemed fresher and younger than it had done a moment before.

"I believe," he said cheerfully, "that I now have the strength to make myself quite clear. And strength is needed for that, as you will soon see, Maria. At the present moment there is only one alternative possible for us, but two for you." He stopped and thoughtfully blinked his eyes. "To cut a long story short," he resumed, "our Cause has reached a crisis. My sister will have told you why — yes, and she will also have told you to what extent you yourself are compromised. It happens to be fortunate for us, for the Party, that the time for action should have arrived at a moment when it is necessary to forestall the threatened intervention of the State. That is our only

chance — and this evening it was decided upon. You, Princess, have still the choice either to admit your association with these events, and to leave Florence, or to deny it and to remain here."

"I have the choice?" exclaimed the Princess in surprise. "Why do you leave me the choice? Why do you not at least try to force your decision upon me? For you must surely know what you have decided I ought to do, or what you would like me to do."

"Gasto!" Madda whispered excitedly, "I confess I cannot follow your intentions any longer."

Guerra met his sister's objection with a furtive smile and then looked steadily at the Princess.

"Maria," he said slowly, "I know of two alternatives for you. Which of them it is that I desire, I will — I refuse to consider. But to deny all connection with the events does not, of course, mean that you will forget them, or allow them to fade away . . ."

Maria Corleone felt a dull pressure at the back of her head. It was as if the thought that was now trying to penetrate her brain was too big for it. For a moment she closed her eyes and groaned faintly. Madda, who was watching her, said to her brother:

"I have tormented Maria enough already today. I am not sure whether much of it was not unnecessary."

Guerra scrutinised her face and nodded.

"Possibly, Madda," he said, "we know nothing whatever about the future. We do not even know ourselves. Princess," he added, turning to Maria Corleone and speaking more loudly, "enough of meditation! Please try to listen carefully to what I am going to tell you. The impending action in Central Italy, and not in Tuscany alone, does not originate in my brain but is dictated by the Central Bureau. I do not intend this merely to sound like an apology, I actually mean it as one. Let me say all I have to say, Maria," he added quickly, just as the Princess was about to interrupt. "You will then lack no answers to your questions. Today is the 10th of October. The

action in Tuscany is planned to take place simultaneously with the one in Bologna, that is to say, on the 17th of October. But both depend upon the signal which is to come two days beforehand, that is to say, on the 15th, from Modena, yes, Princess, on the 15th of October, from Modena."

Maria Corleone's lips were slightly parted, and seizing the sides of the table left and right, she rose slowly to her feet.

"Yes . . . Modena . . ." she murmured, suddenly panting as if she had been running fast. "Modena . . . well, go on . . . that's the Grand Duke . . ."

"For Heaven's sake be calm!" said Guerra almost harshly. "You must give yourself a chance of considering the matter well. Yes, the Grand Duke will reach Modena on the 15th. We are therefore confronted by a political attempt on his life in the first place, and on the life of the Duke of Modena in the second. And two marksmen, belonging to the Party, have actually been posted in a suitable house in the Via del Palazzo, which the Princes will have to pass on their way to the castle. The coup has been so carefully prepared that we may depend absolutely on its success."

He spoke calmly, as if he were making a report. For a moment the Princess swayed from side to side, then she sat down again and remained as stiff as a statue. Madda was breathing heavily, as if with difficulty, and dropping her head slightly she looked up at her brother. Guerra did not take his eyes off the Princess. Then speaking more slowly, he said:

"If the attempt succeeds, it will be the signal for action in Modena, and this in its turn will be the signal for Bologna and ourselves. You grasp the consequences, Princess?" And he made a conclusive gesture with his hand. "I must also tell you that in Scaleterra's opinion, and, to be quite frank, my own also, the assassination of the sovereign can have only a — let us say, a routine object, but it will not lead to any insurrection in a revolutionary sense. Logically speaking, therefore, the rising, particularly in Tuscany, will not be successful, and in view of the inadequate forces at my disposal will easily be suppressed.

The Central Bureau is certainly aware of this too, and all it wishes to do is to manufacture martyrs in the sacred Cause."

Madda sprang to her feet.

"Gasto!" she cried, "are you mad?"

Silent and deaf, Guerra stared in front of him.

"No!" the Princess replied for him emphatically, and blushed scarlet. Madda dropped her arms and allowed her head to sink as if she had been scolded.

"Thank you, Princess," said Guerra deeply moved. "My sister must already be aware of why you said No."

"I understand already," said the girl very softly.

Maria Corleone passed a hand over her eyes, and asked:

"Am I to tell you, Gasto, what I personally have decided to do?"

"Oh no," he rejoined hurriedly.

3

The Bargello stood vast, dull, black and brutal in the moonlight, like one of Piranesi's Fever Cities. Some time had already elapsed since its awe-inspiring bell had clanged out the hour of eleven. Its tones coursed down the very legs of the night revellers, and cudgelled them back to their homes. For it had been proved time and again that it was unwise after the mournful echo of the Bargello bell had died away to entertain the absurd idea of running away when, in the badly illumined streets, a light could be seen approaching, a sudden crafty light, which hardly had it appeared when it was multiplied a thousandfold. Beneath the light hung menacingly the notorious knotty truncheon of a constable of the *Buon Governo,* and behind the light loomed the face of one of the countless spies which, to the man who is caught, look at that hour as much alike as cats' faces must look to a mouse. The examination, opening with a surly good evening, would deal with all the possibilities as to whence and whither, and other private concerns, and end, according to the social standing, credibility

and possibly also the liberality of the man with the light focussed upon him, or the mood, zeal and, possibly, acquisitiveness of the light-bearer, with a prompt release, escort home with or about a beating, or arrest and tumultuous transport to the Bargello, or to one of the two other gaols, which for obvious reasons the populace dubbed "coal scuttles," one of which was on the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, and the other in the Borgo Tegolaia.

This tolling of the curfew from the Chief Magistrate's Palace was one of the paternal educative institutions of the Grand Duke, to which people had grown accustomed. For after all it was quite unnecessary for any honourable citizen to be staggering without good cause over the silent cobbles of the town round about the hour of midnight. That hour should belong to the rabble, who could be heard lamenting their fate behind their cell windows by those who passed in front of the Bargello, on their way to the Via del Proconsolo or the Via Sant' Apollinare. If they were duly under lock and key the warders might even allow a mite of pity to be thrown to the ruffians in the shape of a cigar or a *quattrino* dropped into the bag which they used to throw out like bait at the end of a long string.

Scaleterra, the journalist, arrived shortly before the gates were closed, that is to say, just before one o'clock in the morning, at the Porto San Gallo. He had not, like his prudent companions, remained in Settignano for the night, for he still had work to do at the offices of his paper. As Guerra had thought it wise to tell his fellows nothing about Gioia's meeting with Don Lionello, Scaleterra was not even aware of the extent to which his sceptical remarks at the meeting had been justified. For in that case he would have exercised greater caution in regard to his own movements. As it was, he was content to go a little bit out of his way through San Domenico and San Gervasio, the little holiday resort outside the gates of the town, where he knocked up a cabman he knew and asked to be driven to Florence. When the half-closed carriage drew up at the

Porto San Gallo, the old soldier who kept the gate thrust his cumbersome cylindrical helmet and a bull's-eye lantern beneath the roof of the carriage, and put his questions. Everything was in order. Then suddenly a head appeared on the other side but disappeared again as soon as the journalist turned towards it. This filled him with vague alarm. But the carriage was allowed to drive on. Shortly afterwards, just before the wheels of the vehicle rattled over the cobbles of the Via San Gallo, Scaleterra heard a strange whistling sound, not loud but very penetrating. He now began to feel extremely uneasy; for he was to some extent familiar with the habits of the police. Peering cautiously out at the back of the carriage, he could see nothing. Owing to the shaking of the badly-sprung cab the wretched lamps danced behind him like will-o'-the-wisps. Then he was rattled through the gloomy Bargo San Lorenzo, and across the deserted Piazza San Giovanni into the narrow Via Calzaiuoli, where his editorial offices were situated. A sudden inspiration made him raise his stick and tap the coachman on the back.

"Don't stop, Pietro!" he cried, "drive on to my house."

He peered cautiously right and left. He was not mistaken. Opposite his editorial offices three bull's-eye lanterns were waiting in a doorway. He fell back into the seat of the carriage and reflected. It was just possible that the spies were not there on his account but were keeping watch on the opposition newspapers as a whole. It seemed somewhat of an exaggeration to suppose there could be any connection between the mysterious incidents at the Porto San Gallo and the three detectives, and that it all centred round him — the idea was merely a nightmare born of the uncomfortable evening he had spent. Moreover, where did they imagine he was going at this hour of the night? The devil take them! He was driving home!

Meanwhile the carriage was rattling across the Piazza del Granducca, after which it turned sharp to the left into the narrow Via Vaccherecia, in which the journalist lived. A glance along the crescent set his mind completely at rest. His

house lay bathed in peaceful blackness, and there was no sign of a lantern in the neighbourhood. The carriage drew up.

Scaleterra heaved a sigh of relief as he locked the front door behind him. No, there was no sign of a lantern! They had all been hallucinations of his brain. His nerves were giving way, he thought, as he fumbled for matches. His rooms were on the second floor. The stairs were winding and badly built, and, half blinded by the little light he carried, it was only when he reached the last flight that he noticed that the little landing in front of his private front-door was lit up. Cautiously craning his neck, he was immediately covered by the light of a bull's-eye lantern. He had the presence of mind not to stop or to turn back, but to advance towards the light with an expression of astonishment.

"Good evening, Professor," said a voice. The lanterns were held so skilfully that Scaleterra could not see the faces of their bearers.

"Good evening," he replied calmly, and made towards his door, before which the three columns of light shone out. "Would you kindly allow me, if you please. This is my door. I want to open it."

The lights did not move. The voice explained:

"Excuse me, Professor, I am sorry to say that is impossible . . ."

"I am not a professor," Scaleterra interrupted, clinking a few gold pieces in his pocket, "but if I can compensate you gentlemen for your regrettable mistake and unnecessary trouble . . . I just happen to have three ducats on me . . ."

"I am extremely sorry," said the voice very courteously, "there is no mistake about it at all, Signor Scaleterra — and by the by I am *Capo agente,*" he added pompously, turning the badge of his infamous office to the light — a bamboo stick with a silver knob.

The journalist now saw that the matter was exceedingly grave. The "*agenti*" were under the immediate orders of the President of the *Buon Governo* and were called into action

to deal with difficult cases, and particularly political crimes. The presence of a *Capo agente* indicated a case of more than usual importance, which had been under consideration for a long time. Scaleterra felt a cold shudder run down his spine. But he was a cool and collected man, and had himself well in hand.

"And what is it you want then, gentlemen?" he asked after a moment's pause. One of the *agenti* had passed by him and taken up a position on the top step of the stairs, so as to cut off his retreat. The *Capo agente* replied:

"The President wishes you to come to his study for an urgent interview."

"At this late hour? Can't it wait until the morning?"

"I am afraid not, Signore."

"All right, I am ready."

And they descended the stairs. Scaleterra felt the men so close behind him that their bull's-eyes warmed his back. He then saw four detectives standing in the street. The *Capo agente* kept close to the journalist's side, his two colleagues walked in front, and the four others brought up the rear. And thus the silent procession crossed the dead Piazza, passed the bronze Cosimo, riding through the moonlight, entered the Via de' Condi, which was buried in the shade of the vast Palazzo Vecchio, and soon arrived at San Firenze. The Bargello loomed black and evil. The guard opened the side door and the party marched into the courtyard. The crash of the closing door echoed deep into Scaleterra's heart and made it jump. "When shall I leave this place again?" he asked himself, and for a moment he felt so angry with Guerra that his jaws clenched. "What manner of man is he? He traffics finely with other men's lives! Will he really stake his own life in the game? He and the Princess . . . he and his wild sister . . . ?"

"*Commediante,*" he murmured, as they climbed the steps.

On the first floor, the detectives and the two *agenti* remained behind, and the *Capo agente* led the journalist through various Government offices which in the gleam of the searchlight

seemed to blink like sleepy men. Then he knocked once, twice, on a pair of folding doors. At last a voice, drunk with sleep, cried, "*Avanti!*" The official opened the door and announced:

"The journalist Scaleterra is here, my lord President."

In a trice Caminer's voice was wide awake.

"Yes, yes, at last! Just come in, will you?"

Scaleterra stepped into the large bare office of the chief of Police. The latter, who, with his collar open and his hair dishevelled, was sitting on a couch, got up. One or two candles were burning on his writing table. The corners of the room were dark.

The *Capo agente* remained standing at the door.

"Good morning, Signore," the ruddy-fair man exclaimed with a broad smile. "You seem to be fond of evening excursions."

And he looked towards the official, who immediately repeated:

"Signor Scaleterra arrived at his quarters at 5 Via Vaccheccia in a carriage at a quarter past one, when according to orders I took him into custody."

"Thank you," Caminer rejoined, "you may go now, Fossi. But remain ready at hand."

The *Capo agente* retired. Caminer passed an ugly hand through his hair and beard, and tried to make his broad tie look a little bit tidier.

"Sit down, won't you, Signore," he said, still busy about his attire, and with a strangely familiar motion of his head, he indicated a chair. Scaleterra observed how the Governor's massive chin constantly disarranged the work of his fair-red hands, and was suddenly seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh. He coughed and with much to-do sat down. With some difficulty, owing to the throttling tightness of his tie, Caminer looked across at him.

"Don't let me disturb your comfort, Cavaliere. Surely in the middle of the night like this we can talk to each other with bare necks!"

Caminer dropped his hands in surprise. His tie came undone again and hung in two melancholy streamers down his shirt front.

"Thank you, thank you, sir," he said, somewhat embarrassed. "I am glad to find you in such good spirits. It doesn't often happen, I can assure you, in this room, even in the day time." And going over to the writing table, he trimmed the candles with the snuffers. "As a matter of fact, Scaleterra," he said, resuming the conversation, and blinking through the lights at his companion, "you are strangely lacking in curiosity. It is hardly likely that I should have asked you here in order to offer you liqueurs, and your coolness is either exceedingly admirable, or . . ."

He stopped, laid the snuffers aside, and sitting down, opened a document. The journalist saw the man was irritated by him.

"Why do you not mention the most obvious reason, Mr. President? For my conscience, at all events, is quite clear."

Caminer looked up, smiling broadly.

"A clean conscience!" he said, laughing heartily. "In my opinion that is a myth! I acknowledge that my psychology is perhaps a little bit one-sided; but a fairly wide experience tells me that there is no such thing as a clean conscience!"

Scaleterra turned his calm intelligent eyes upon him.

"Do you, Mr. President, constitute the exception to that rule? Excuse me, but for the moment we are merely philosophising — or do you include yourself in your theory? Such consistency would of course, be difficult to attack."

"Hm!" muttered Caminer, taken aback, "of course — hm! I do not exclude myself. But it strikes me that our conversation is getting a little bit unbusinesslike. As a matter of fact, my dear friend, you misunderstand the situation — or, very naturally, you wish to misunderstand it. Politically speaking, Scaleterra, you have by no means a clean sheet. I only say this in view of your claim to a clean conscience. Perhaps you will even allow me to gain an accurate knowledge of everything that can be read there."

The journalist's thick nostrils quivered slightly.

"I am the responsible editor of a Liberal newspaper," he replied rather tartly, "which certainly does not always see eye to eye with the Government, and whose rounded periods are now and again destroyed by the censorship. I gladly acknowledge white patches such as these on my conscience, Mr. President."

"Good, good," Caminer replied, pulling impatiently at his ruddy beard, "that you are at liberty to do, my dear sir. I do not count these white patches either, and your tactics are to be commended. But we are not diplomatists, and the Bargello is not a conference hall. It is almost three o'clock, my dear sir, and I must alter my tone. The Bargello is not only a black patch, but it also sees black patches, even in you, particularly in you. Let us come straight to the real point, Scaleterra. You are a Carbonaro — that is to say, a member of one of those secret societies, with revolutionary aims, forbidden by the State. You are not a mere member, but an active official of the Tuscan branch. You are the leader of the chief Florentine group, which includes the centre of the city together with the Government offices, and figures under the name of 'Piazza.' These are the preliminary facts, my dear sir."

And Caminer leant comfortably back in his chair, and folded his hands over his belly. He was in full swing. He was happy. His eyes twinkled pleasantly, almost tenderly, between their half-closed lids, at his victim. Scaleterra's large nose grew red and twitched nervously. In dire distress he pulled out his handkerchief, and blew his nose in a leisurely manner, for he wanted to gain time to think things out.

"Think of that, Pier Luigi," he exclaimed, deciding to adopt a tone of light self-banter, "what a dignified office you hold without knowing it! Carbonaro — functionary — group leader! Why not President of the Grand Council of Carbonari straight away? Most honoured Cavaliere, I find myself unable to agree with your statement of so-called facts, for the simple reason that it is not true."

Caminer gave a full-throated laugh. It was a detestable laugh which laid his gullet bare and seemed to devour his opponent. The journalist's eyelids quivered.

"Yes, my dear friend," roared the President, "do either of us care whether you agree or not? I strongly suspect that at the present moment you are not feeling half as comfortable as I am. Now I am in a position to give you, so to speak — I use metaphor, as is only right in dealing with a literary man — I can give you a certain straw to clutch, an unexpected though very substantial possibility, by means of which you can clamber up on my secure craft. Otherwise, *amico,* you are in danger of drowning . . . if I may say so."

The journalist dilated his nostrils, and fidgeted nervously with his fingers.

"Mr. President," he said, trying without much conviction to present a bold front, "you are not a literary man. May I therefore beg you to drop metaphor and make yourself as clear as possible?"

The Governor made a hearty sign of consent with his hand, and taking from a drawer a sheet of paper bearing the arms of the President of the *Buon Governo,* he snorted complacently and dipped his pen in the ink.

"Certainly, Signor Scaleterra," he said with a bow, "I will be as businesslike as I can. I tell you quite frankly that I rejoice to find in you, a — well, to use a familiar formula — a political intelligence which I know how to value at its proper worth. I am not a man for compliments, neither is the Bargello a place for them. You are clever, and I need not waste words on you, or spend much time on preambles. Political tactics, like military tactics, belong to the sphere of mathematics, rather than to that of sentiment. I know who you are and what you are up to. That is unfortunate for you so long as we stand opposed. But we can square things up and reduce ourselves to a common denominator, so to speak. Look, Scaleterra, here is a clean sheet of official paper, and here is the pen ready to write with. Just say yes, and in five minutes, in three even, you

can go home with the appointment of secret agent to the Political Department. You are a University man, and you will be made a Commissioner — that I promise you — the moment you . . . Well, we'll discuss that in due course. If I am pressing you too hard, I can wait until tomorrow morning for your reply. Well? "

Scaleterra had suddenly grown wonderfully calm. He was a man with a heart of gold, who, though perhaps not a hero, suddenly grew courageous as soon as his spiritual probity was threatened. He was now able to smile quite openly and to reply in a firm voice:

" All I can say is No! Mr. President."

Caminer closed his eyes, and smiled indulgently, his head swaying thoughtfully from side to side.

" But my dear Scaleterra," he rejoined mildly, and his Venetian accent became more sing-song than ever, " in your position and with your brains, I should have put off that answer at least until the morning. It is most regrettable — most regrettable. For, as you can plainly see, *amico,* I have not laid the pen aside. So there may be something different to be written on this paper. But I will not write anything yet. In your interest, I will considerably reduce the extent of the compliance expected of you, and make your personal freedom depend on the answer to three definite questions which will not lie heavily either on your clean conscience or your guilty one. May I ask them? "

" Do please," replied the journalist. Toying with the pen, Caminer suddenly looked sternly at him.

" Have you during the course of the day seen the beggar Gioia — quite by accident, of course? "

" Who is the beggar Gioia? " Scaleterra asked in reply. The President turned his eyes away with a resigned expression.

" Oh God! " he sighed. " That is paltry! That is surely a very primitive form of deception! I am perfectly well aware that you know him. It is also more than probable that you have seen him today. To speak quite frankly, what I should be

interested to discover is where he lives. Have you any sort of idea, Scaleterra? The slightest hint will suffice . . ."

The journalist frowned.

"You override every one of my objections on principle, Mr. President," he said. "This is not an examination at all. What am I supposed to answer you?"

Caminer's head swayed sorrowfully from side to side.

"Most, most regrettable," he murmured. "I hardly have the courage to ask the second question. Nevertheless, we'll try it, all the same. Have you perhaps seen the Princess today, Signor Scaleterra? If you are clever, you will not retort, 'Which Princess?'"

"Nevertheless," said the journalist with a smile, "I must protest against this extraordinary way of forbidding me to be stupid."

Caminer breathed heavily through his nostrils.

"What a bungler you are all of a sudden, Scaleterra," he blustered. "You have no idea how plainly you are in fact answering my questions. And I am curious to hear what you will reply next. Where were you this evening?"

The journalist grew agitated, as he did not know how long the spies had been on his track. Turning the matter over rapidly in his mind, he came to the conclusion that the approximate truth would be safest.

"In the afternoon, as it was such beautiful weather, I took a long walk through Coverciano to Setignano. I dined there and sauntered back through Majano and San Domenico to San Gervasio, where I hired a fly to bring me back to Florence."

Caminer smiled.

"That's the first reply that has given me the least little bit of satisfaction," he droned again in his sing-song Venetian. "Unfortunately, however, it is not sufficient to obtain your release." And he let his left hand fall so heavily on the table that Scaleterra started with fright. Whereupon, changing his tone, he continued, "To cut a long story short, Scaleterra, if you will tell me — if you will give me Gasto Guerra's address,

you will not only be free, but under the special protection of the police."

"I do not know it," replied the journalist. Caminer gave an indecently loud laugh, and flushing with joy, scribbled the order for Scaleterra's incarceration.

Fossi, the *Capo agente,* who entered as soon as the President's bell rang, led the prisoner to the cell which had already been prepared for him.

4

It was at about this time in the night that the Guerras got back to Borgunto. The road had been long and they had walked slowly, as if relieved of time and space, of weariness also, and even of the need of speaking — of asking questions and answering them. The magic moon had sunk. The night was heavy and pitch black — bereft of enchantment, menacing, no longer peaceful, but merely silent. The invisible couple, behind their lantern, waded through it as through a slimy marsh. But the feeling of being enshrouded and covered in was favourable to meditation. Leaning on her brother's arm Maddalena frequently closed her eyes. And then she was alone with her soul and its tumult. She was conscious of nothing in the world outside save the road beneath her feet and the arm to which she clung. Suddenly she pressed that arm with all her might for a second, as if she had been frightened.

"Well, Madda?" Guerra enquired softly and kindly. But as the girl did not speak he relapsed into silence again. He wanted to leave her time to become adapted to the events of the night. And if she failed, she would have the magic hood of the night between her own face and his, in case she wished to ask certain questions and he to answer them, or in case he wished to ask her and she to reply. He too perceived the meaning of the night — or he imagined he perceived it.

Thus he led the way slowly, carefully avoiding heavy cart ruts and large stones when the dull flare of his lantern would

sweep quickly over the walls or tree stumps about them. The world had grown small, as if broken into fragments. Owing to the lateness of the hour, or to the darkness which he wished to turn to account, he avoided taking the short cut over Monte Ceceri, and followed the high road which rising slowly led from Majano to Fiesole.

When they were half way up, close to the porch of the Villa Medici, the girl stopped and let go of her brother's arm. He went on a few steps further, then turning round, flashed the light of his lantern on her face. She quickly covered her eyes; but he had already seen that they were tear-stained. Turning the shaft of light away, he went back to her.

"Come along," he said, and took her gently by the arm. She obeyed.

Just a little below the village, the road turned to the right. At this point the cypresses of two carriage drives, right and left of the road, stood so close up to the highway that they almost formed a wooded glen, which on hot days afforded welcome shade to man and beast. This night the trees could not be seen, though their proximity could be felt, and the blackness seemed even blacker at this spot. Perhaps this was also due to the fact that at the end of the road, at the point where it wound up to the Piazzale, and the stony mass of the Ecclesiastical Seminary rose above the horizon, the weary twinkling lights of a restaurant could be seen. Again Madda pressed Guerra's arm, and though it was only for a moment, it was almost painful.

"What are you frightened about?" he enquired kindly. "And why did you say nothing? After all, I am here to answer you, Madda."

Still she was silent; but he felt she was looking at him. "Am I quite honest towards her?" he asked himself suddenly, and the thought struck him so forcibly that it made his heart beat fast. Then the girl spoke for the first time.

"How black the night is now."

Her voice was much softer and calmer than he had expected it to be. He felt she was offering him the cloak of the night for

a confession, a screen to hide shame, a covering for the soul, as he had expected it to serve all the way. What could be the meaning of such pride of spirit which made two creatures of the same blood wait for the confession of the other — for a confession which shunned the light? This was the question he asked himself. But he replied to his soul, that the girl who was quietly crying to herself about something unmentionable could not be called haughty; that he alone could be accused of that, for did he not want this dreadful thing to be voiced aloud, to be spoken? Was he after all possessed of the old evil desire to torment those who loved him? And Madda of all people, who must have been thoroughly unstrung by the scene at Isola — aye, and possibly bereft of her whole grasp on life and on her own life?

"Yes, Madda," he began, speaking hurriedly in his excitement, "let me answer your questions without waiting for you to put them. You must not harbour any doubts, my child, either about me or my actions. That would be the worst thing of all for me. Do you suppose I could act without any sense of responsibility or forethought? Madda, do you suppose for one moment that I could not justify myself to you?"

"Justify?" she repeated softly, as if with faint irony. Guerra took no notice.

"In three words," he said cheerfully, "in three words I can justify myself both in your eyes and in those of the Party . . ."

"Don't talk now," the girl interrupted, "we are getting close to the houses."

They had reached the Piazzale, which, broad and empty, stretched eastward, looking wretched in the light of two miserable little lanterns which rocked above it in the wind. In only a few of the houses was there a light, and the stillness was only broken by the howling of cats and from the far end of the deserted square, where the Town Hall stood, by the sound of hobnailed boots ringing on the stones. It was the old soldier who acted as night-watchman. All that could be seen of him was his lantern swinging to and fro. The Guerras did not cross

the full length of the square in order to enter the high road to Borgunto, but turned to the left behind the vague shadow of the cathedral, into a little passage leading to the now extinct Via Portigiani, which encircled the town above the Roman Theatre, and also ran in an easterly direction. When the road had left the last houses of the town behind and wound down hill between the silent walls of a park, Guerra, finding himself once more in the blackness of night, groaned and said:

"You make me feel nervous, Madda, or is it this endless road, which is beginning to strike me as terribly desolate? Do you imagine then that I have betrayed the cause of the Party? I have perhaps done the very reverse, Madda."

She was silent. He raised his voice.

"Madda, I know what I have done. It is not nearly as much as that. I have pushed open for fate a door which was already ajar. Good old Scaleterra said just exactly what I felt this evening. The thing is bound to fail. I gave Maria different instructions from what I had intended, in order to challenge not only an evil destiny but also a good one. Madda, of course I don't know what she will do; but, my dear child, I may have saved the lives of numbers of people — for a gladiatorial show which will not be quite so foolish."

The hand on his arm did not stir; he also knew that she was not looking at him, and he found himself listening to her voice which was full of unconcealed hostility. It was a voice he did not know at all, neither did he understand the words she used:

"Gasto, what do you care about other people and their deaths or their lives, and the Party and its aims . . ."

"Madda!" he interrupted, utterly taken aback. But he was soon silent again. Any attempt at defence or justification suddenly struck him as senseless — aye, even ludicrous — not only because he was forced to acknowledge the justice of her remark, but because he did not dare to draw the full significance from the thought and feeling which lay behind her words. She too was silent, though she coughed irritably. The road wound down sharply to the house of a carpenter, behind which the

path, joining this low-lying portion of the town with Borgunto, ran up a steep incline. Guerra went on in front, so as to light the way. He held her hand.

"What am I to think of you?" he murmured at last. "Possibly I am only anxious about my own — about our lives. Surely that is comprehensible enough?"

"Yes," she said simply, "but you probably only thought of that this minute."

Guerra shook his head and continued climbing. Her hand lay calm and cold in his. The swaying lantern revealed the old well to the left, where the stone steps began. Guerra was breathing heavily. The walk seemed to have been an effort to him. On the first steps he suddenly asked, almost panting:

"Would you be able, Madda . . . would you be able to denounce your brother . . . yes, to denounce me . . . to the Central Bureau?"

And he turned suddenly round, and flooded her face with light. Again she shielded her eyes with her hand. About her mouth was a convulsive line, which he had not seen before, and which vanished as she answered softly:

"No, Gasto — I have already thought about that — now — on the road — it is difficult — to say . . ."

He turned round silently and walked on.

"No I cannot," he heard in his rear, "I don't believe that I ever . . . But now you know how far my thoughts have travelled."

He said nothing. The steps now ran between two houses in Borgunto; they were nearing their destination. At this point a wretched lantern lent a ghastly mystery to the road. The two travellers were now merely nondescript shadows without features. She clung close to him in a wild outburst of tenderness.

"What do I care about all that . . . the Party . . . what? . . . Oh Gasto, Gasto!"

He did not answer, but he did not push her from him. They entered their front garden. The steps led down as if to a cellar. But it was only on account of the steep hill, which forced the

houses to accommodate themselves to it. Beyond the steps was an open passage leading to Guerra's front-door. He opened it. Then in the light of his study lamp Madda saw his sad face.

"Good night, my child," he said, and held out a hand to her.

"No," she cried in anguish, "not like that!"

Throwing back his head, he looked up at the ceiling.

"If I were different, Madda," he said almost inaudibly, "we should be forced to part — and very quickly, this very night!"

"Tell me what you mean, Gasto!" she implored, and came close up to him. "Tell me what you mean!"

"For Heaven's sake keep away from me, Madda!" he begged, and refused to look at her.

"But just tell what is in your mind, Gastino, only that one thing — I don't want to hear more!"

Gasto raised his arms as if he were about to clasp her; but after holding them up for a moment, he let them drop.

"I do not love her any longer, of course," he panted. "There was no love in it at all — love! . . . Child — my love is not there! Poor, poor child! But now go!"

5

Old Baron Steiner never slept for very long. He went to bed late and got up early. Four or five hours of repose — they were not always hours of sleep — were ample for his withered little frame. He had multifarious interests and had much to think about. There was also the wonderful array of things great and small which he loved, and tended with zeal. To find leisure for all these things the remainder of his life had to be run economically and time-robbing sleep curtailed. Strange as it may seem, old Steiner loved his life too.

Like a child, he could not bear to be separated even at night from the objects that occupied his mind, and would carry them into his bedroom from the library next door. All round the vast four-poster bed, the canopy of which was still decorated with the arms of a certain Cardinal Morali, and in which the little

old man was lost like some quaint little mummy, there were shelves, consoles, tables and chairs bearing pictures, sculptures, porcelain vases, engravings and coins, all mysteriously arranged according to the interest they afforded, and sometimes finding their way, for a last look, into the magnificent bed, only to accompany their collector back into the seemingly more businesslike environment of the library on the following morning.

Thus, for Baron Steiner, the night was full of joyous contemplation, in its own way, perhaps, a more passionate version of the day. At all events he never allowed it to become an occasion for making fun of the nocturnal pastimes of other men, the majority of whom he held in no very high regard. His pleasures and pastimes and self-communion were trifling and innocent enough; they certainly pleased him and hurt no one, although his desires and self-esteem were gratified more or less at the cost of his fellows. It was for this reason that he preferred to be awake rather than asleep, very well satisfied with his body's amenability and lack of demands.

But this night was not like other nights. He was filled with an uneasiness he did not quite understand. It was more like those dreadful black hours, which fortunately did not often occur, in which his heart let him know that it was beginning to grow tired. He was, moreover, deeply disappointed with himself; for the precious thing which lay between his cautious hands on the coverlet of the bed certainly had the right to his love and his undivided attention. It was an acquisition which, at first, had almost taken his breath away, particularly as he had come across it quite by accident, and for a very small sum had it brought to his house. He had obtained it from a dock-loafer of Livorno, who had bought up a miscellaneous assortment of Japanese porcelain and lacquer work on board an East-Indiaman and had sent the whole lot to the Baron. He found the treasure among a number of articles of little or no value; it was one of those rare and priceless pieces of porcelain of Mikochiyama on the island of Hirado, a smoking bowl, indescribably beautiful in colour, proportions and moulding, the

decorations representing five Chinese children playing at blindman's buff, chasing one another round a lantern — a treasure worthy of being contemplated and fondled all night long.

But it was impossible! His hands alone remained attentive, though his fingers stroked and fondled the bowl ever more and more mechanically. His brain was distracted from the act of contemplation by the clock striking the hour in the neighbouring tower of San Lorenzo; the dull resonance that followed seemed to drag his body downwards and prevent his eyes from feasting upon the blue, yellow, brown and green glory of the glaze, and finally to oppress his heart. He found it difficult to breathe and looked at the window. The night poured in silver grey through the chinks of the Venetian blinds. It seemed as if outside a veil had been drawn over all the mysteries of the peaceful earth. The old man had no fear of mysteries, provided they allowed him to enter their circle. He was accustomed to them. They constituted the adornments of his profession. But what was there about this night? Was it punishing him for his foolishness, for having abandoned his well-earned indifference to mankind owing to his anxiety about Maria Corleone? Whatever it might be, had he not sufficient cause to be troubled? It was certainly a good thing to have forced her, as he had done that day, to confess her helplessness, and also to have forced himself to offer her help. But was it not perhaps already too late? Had his calculations and her spiritual crisis been twenty-four hours out of reckoning? He opened his shirt at the collar; he was hot all over. He could not help himself, and, laying the piece of porcelain on the table, he stood up, went to the window, and opened the shutters. Opposite him lay the Piazza San Lorenzo. The sinking moon had already plunged the church in darkness, blotted out the naked façade, leaving only the squat silhouette, mighty as a fortress, looming in the air. But in the streets below the silvery night still hung like a grey shroud. It was very quiet, and to the Baron the night seemed one fit for assault and murder. It was

no mere fancy. How strange that these dark forebodings should come to him only now! That very afternoon, on entering the Café Doney, at the usual hour, he had seen Prince George in the strange company of a priest — none other than the spy Vacca. It did not exactly surprise him; for the Prince was quite guileless, and was, moreover, always haughtily monosyllabic towards such people. The fact that the suspicions of the God-forsaken Caminer were already circling round Isola astonished him less than the insolence of his agent. But with his gift of turning complicated situations to account, the old man soon joined in the conversation.

"Are you trying to persuade the Prince to go into the confessional, Don Lionello? But that is love's labour lost, I tell you. Last night he lost fifty ducats at faro, and is on the point of selling his soul to the devil!"

The Pretender looked up with the shadow of a smile. The abbot ground his massive jaws, and was obviously far from pleased by the Baron's appearance on the scene. Prince George prattled on in soft sarcastic tones.

"Among the initiated, dear Steiner, is this gentleman not known as the spiritual adviser, so to speak, of the *Buon Governo?*" he asked in nasal tones. "It looks as though the powers that be imagined I was girding up my loins for a fresh fight for a throne, eh! eh! dear Steiner?"

Prince George was amusing himself. The abbot blinked his little eyes, and puffed out his cheeks.

"Excuse me, your Royal Highness, but there seems to be a slight misunderstanding. All I am concerned about, as I have already ventured to remark, is a collection for the Franciscan Convent in the Via San Nicolo."

"A collection, dear Steiner!" said the Prince with a chuckle.

"Well," said the old Baron, "Don Lionello is known as a gallant, and has the proper build for it too, your Highness." And glancing at the abbot with his grey eyes he unexpectedly put down his trump. "But if, dear sir, you wish to collect money for your pious purposes, why don't you go out to Isola,

and apply to the Princess? She is a pious woman, with a kindly interest in Franciscan sisters, and above all she is somewhat bored with life just now."

Vacca raised his thick brows, forgetting for a moment to shut his mouth. Whereupon, with a courteous greeting and a somewhat wry smile on his face, he took his leave. That was all that happened. Nevertheless, it was an extremely skilful piece of work. The old Baron at the window took the credit for it to himself. But it certainly warded off no danger, prevented no arbitrary action on one side or the other, all of which might fall on a certain beautiful head. For he well knew. . . .

But suddenly he was filled with consternation. Spies' whistles could be heard from the direction of the Via San Gallo, and were being passed along to the Via San Giovanni — like the hunting cries of spirits or evil thoughts. Steiner half closed his shutters. He was frightened — really frightened. He tried to smile and take himself to task. But lo! a carriage now appeared driving from the Via San Gallo, past his house and along the Via San Giovanni, following the course taken by the whistles. Who could be in that carriage? the old man asked himself anxiously. What deed of darkness could the poor creature be hatching or accomplishing? And why do I stand here like a paralysed oracle, worthless as are my few remaining days?

And so he went back to bed, distressed and thoroughly shaken. With a faint feeling of guilt towards it, he took up the smoker's bowl of Hirado again. Indeed, what better could he do? And his eyes turned obediently back to the figures and the colours. The five Chinese youngsters were chasing one another round the lantern-pole, blue, yellow, brown and green — their large jolly heads had dark knots of hair left and right like devil's horns — one of them was climbing gleefully up the notched pole which leant a little to one side and was croaking clownishly out of his froglike mouth. . . .

At last, tired out, the old man fell asleep, still holding the porcelain treasure in his hands. Fortunately his small body

occupied so little space in the vast bed, that when the bowl glided from his chest it found plenty of room beside him. It was most unusual for old Steiner to fall asleep in this irresponsible way, and although faint promptings stirred him betimes on the following morning, urging him to get up and settle what was puzzling him, the second exceptional thing occurred when on the arrival at seven in the morning of one of the Princess' servants in a light trap to fetch him, he was found to be still asleep. The Baronissimo, who usually on rising required two hours to dress was ready in ten minutes, fresh and perfectly rested, and owing to the brightness of the day, almost free of care, though certainly somewhat curious and anxious; for the Princess' note contained only the brief request that he should go to Isola immediately. But it was not an alarm call, nor did the writing look desperate. And he felt a little ashamed when, as he drove through the autumn gold, he recalled the spectres of the previous night. The magic of the landscape made life seem light again. The fast horses reached the hill of Isola in a little less than an hour.

Maria Corleone, who was still in bed, looked nervous but certainly not unhappy. She even smiled when, somewhat out of breath, after coming upstairs, the Baron entered, kissed her hand, and in his cordial manner, said:

"Here I am, Princess, and the fact that for the first time in my life I appear unshaven before you must be ascribed to the circumstances."

"Yes, dear friend," she replied, "and at this precise juncture I even approve of your sprouting beard."

Whereupon they grew grave and looked into each other's eyes. Steiner stroked her hair lightly and said softly:

"So you know something more, Maria?"

"Oh yes," she replied. "I have just been told all sorts of things. Perhaps, perhaps one has succeeded in doing one's duty. But I am not certain about that. Truth to tell, everything is very simple. The Grand Duke will be in Venice until the 14th of October. Meanwhile can you ask the Venetian Chargé

d'Affaires attached to the Power with whom you work, just as if the affair were a matter of your own knowledge — for we must both try to keep out of it all — to tell the Grand Duke that, owing to possible political outrages, he should avoid the land route, and return to Florence by water via Rimini? "

Old Steiner stroked his chin, and pouted his lips as if he were about to whistle. But it was merely an effort to conceal his surprise or emotion.

"Oh yes," he said thoughtfully in matter of fact tones, "that will be quite possible. For urgent messages of that sort I have a poor painter at hand, a very poor painter in both senses of the word, but a confoundedly expert courier . . ." He stopped and looked gravely, almost sternly at the Princess. "You must have gone through a bad time, Maria, and now you must be feeling happier — I mean you have succeeded in doing your duty, *Altezza.*"

THE CHORUS OF THE LADEN

I

Had the Chief of the Vienna Police as well as the Emperor himself not called the attention of their Tuscan guest to the revolutionary commotions in Central Italy, and urged him to be cautious in his movements, the Grand Duke might, in keeping with his character, have been less inclined to heed the warning of the foreign Chargé d'Affaires in Venice and at the last moment alter the plans for his homeward journey, which had been dictated by political considerations. Nor did he reach his decision until he had pondered it well during a sleepless night. His chief cause of distress was not so much fear for his own life, as the thought that his long established and assured position as ruler of his State should be menaced by certain crude and contemptible elements in its population. What did these men expect of him, if they hated Austria and were trying to set up an anarchical system of nationalism? He was a Tuscan, and a good prince — the best prince his contented country could wish to have. Contented country! The throne, from its fatal position, is prone to see, indeed almost always does see, a contented country. And yet every age of history proves that from no angle could the prospect be more deceptive. The Grand Duke was annoyed at the critical parenthesis which with wanton wilfulness, as it were, wedged itself into his meditations. At the same time, he was amazed at the peculiar workings of the human mind, which in a trice could conjure up arguments quite foreign and opposed to the idea it had formed. But no! he felt he was secure, even inwardly, in the mysterious region of his conscience. Even for the so-called patriots there

was no justification for an attempt on his life, that is to say, on the symbol of the State which he represented. Not only would it be criminal, it would be an act of folly, nay, more than an act of folly, a political calamity. And he must fight it quite impersonally, without his own feelings being involved, and with harsh and businesslike methods. To this end a deviation, a change of route, might be indicated as a first step, and as a second, the need of showing indifference towards a possible snort of disapproval from that unsympathetic victim of neurasthenia, the Prince of Modena, who, as the Grand Duke once spitefully remarked, deserved his revolution like a good Bourbon.

Meanwhile he once more summoned the foreign Chargé d'Affaires to his presence at the Hôtel Danieli, and put certain questions to him. From what source had his warning emanated? Could he mention any particular town in which the outrage was planned to take place? Or had he only been informed that generally speaking the whole area covered by the journey was suspect? Did the source of his information — and this was very important — reside in Tuscany? The diplomat was reserved, but at the same time full of that veiled assurance which had not failed of its effect on the Grand Duke even at the first interview. He spoke with that perfect certainty of expression and mien which, without any bowings and scrapings, made the nation to which he belonged seem exemplary in the eyes of the Grand Duke. But he declared that as a political official, he was bound to treat the information as a secret of State, and that the Grand Duke would be in no danger until in his cross-country journey he had left the southern frontier of Venetia. Apparently the coup had been planned for some time and originated in a Radical quarter. The Grand Duke asked the diplomat a second time whether he was convinced that the danger was sufficiently great to warrant the abandonment of a journey of no slight political importance. The Chargé d'Affaires replied with grave emphasis that nothing could be more important than the life of His Imperial and Royal Highness,

which, in the circumstances, would be threatened with immediate danger.

Accordingly, the Grand Duke, without giving any reasons, applied for an Austrian man-o'-war to convey himself, his family and his suite to Rimini, and sent one of his Chamberlains home by the land route, *viâ* Modena and Bologna, to apologise for his sovereign on the grounds of indisposition. Incidentally the foreign diplomat in question was given a fairly high honour on board the frigate, together with a gracious acknowledgment in the Grand Duke's own handwriting.

The news which was brought to Florence by the Chamberlain, who travelled post haste, did but increase the excitement at the Palazzo Vecchio; for the alteration in the route seemed to be due merely to a whim on the sovereign's part. Del Monte, the old Prime Minister, as the result of certain recent happenings, and the sudden, mysterious fears that had seized the Government, had gone through a grave personal crisis, particularly in his relations with Caminer, and was seriously considering the inconceivable idea of resigning as soon as his sovereign returned. Nevertheless the disquieting state of affairs was known to nobody in its full gravity — neither to the officials of the various departments, who had learnt to interpret the taciturnity and growing irony of their Chief differently, nor to society. Even by the terrible Caminer himself, it was felt only for a few seconds; and it had been entirely owing to his clumsy zeal that the Marchese had been induced to control himself and recover something of his old assurance.

When, with excited gestures, he had told del Monte of the midnight arrest of Scaleterra, the Prime Minister, mad with rage, had given vent to his feelings with ill-concealed offensiveness. And it was precisely this act of violence which, owing to its complete failure, had left him so deeply depressed. He had been prompted, not by any interest in the journalist, who was unknown to him, or in the case itself, the importance of which he was inclined to under-estimate, but by an uncontrollable desire to attack, to assault the low machinations and squat,

rudely, robust personality of Caminer himself. It was as if he were trying to defend himself against the irresistible devilry of such an official, and had probably called to mind instances which had not always been above suspicion, when he too, moved by a feeling of personal dislike, had secured for no apparent reason the pensioning off or retirement of a man he disliked. In short, behind all the vague promptings of spite and deep desire, he was conscious of a definite intention to bring about the downfall of the President of the *Buon Governo* as quickly and as violently as possible, so that when the sovereign returned it would only be necessary to make public announcement of the fact.

Quickly raising his head, he opened his eyes wide, and his frowning brows cut a stern white line across their steely blue. He looked at Caminer as he had rarely looked at him before, gazing not into his eyes, but with peculiar offensiveness at his red forelock. Then putting a fresh cigarette between his lips, he held it there without lighting it. When del Monte smoked cold, and stared, his staff, who knew him of old, were aware that a del Montish explosion was imminent, one of those seismic disturbances of the official world which, though it made little noise, sank very deep. But Caminer did not know this. He looked attentively at his Chief, with an air of mingled modesty and importance, apparently without asking himself the reason for his companion's pause. All he did was, with a bodily serenity which was somewhat irritating, to shift his weight from one leg to the other.

"Mr. President of the *Buon Governo,*" began the Prime Minister with unaccustomed formality — and his cigarette stuck to his upper lip, a rare phenomenon with him — "I wish to make two observations. In the first place, I have a distinct recollection that in your report of yesterday, you declared that up to the present you had not been able to discover any Tuscan revolutionary committee. And yet that same night you arrest an alleged Carbonaro, and declare that you know, not only the Party to which he belongs, but also his status and function in

the conspiracy, and you even undertake to name his group, though not, it is true, by any known designation. If, Cavaliere, you have not acquired the whole of your knowledge, and your acquaintance with the machinery of this Tuscan revolutionary Party since our last interview — which in itself would be incredible — I should be inclined to regard your irresponsible behaviour towards me no less severely than I do your arbitrary procedure, concerning which I shall now make my second observation."

Caminer remained calm. All he did was to distribute his weight over both legs, and, as at the same time he also leant his head a little towards his left shoulder, his movement, despite its insignificance, looked dangerous. Del Monte, who had expected to produce a very different effect by his attack, experienced the remarkable sensation of sitting like a defenceless, motionless and broken old man, before a bull, before a bull-man, a mad mythical monster, laden with evil energy, though still able to control its wild strength with reason. The Marchese turned his head away; and with somewhat guttural courtesy, Caminer replied:

"May I beg your Excellency to let me hear his second observation at once. I almost fancy that what I have to say to justify myself will immediately dispose of both your mistaken notions."

Such insolence, such a retort had never been heard within those walls for the last thirty years! The Prime Minister's cold cigarette was convulsed between his lips. The moment had come to dispose of this shaggy red-skin with one or two well-polished, well-aimed sentences, and then have the corpse removed from the house by the knackers of the Pensions Department. Del Monte drew himself up and grasped his famous pencil like a weapon; but he could discover no lever which he could use effectively against the bandy-legged knave. The crude physicality of the fellow reduced his whole relationship to him to physical terms, and all that the old man felt was that his own position or his muscular development was feeble. He also saw

that Caminer — still with his head on one side — was smiling courteously and perhaps with a tinge of amusement.

"My dear Sir," said del Monte resignedly, "you have an extraordinary way of dealing with your superiors. If you wish still to enjoy the honour of conferring with me, then pray answer each one of my questions in turn. I have no use for your verbal economies, do you understand? Neither am I interested in your estimate of anything I have not yet said."

But, astonishing though it may seem, Caminer did not stop smiling. His calm cheerfulness now almost seemed the expression of indulgence, a sort of good-natured regret that his opinion was different and that he was right. Pulling himself together, the Marchese turned his head away, and for the sake of something to do, lit his cigarette and smoked it more quickly than usual.

"Your Excellency's mistake," Cavalier Pompeo began in his sing-song voice, "consists in confusing party organisation with revolutionary committee. As regards the constitution of the Tuscan Independence Party, God knows, I am perfectly clear. I may as well inform you, your Excellency, that I had already collected a certain amount of information about it in the course of my work in Milan. And the reason why I did not impart it to you was because it seemed too insignificant — at least until quite recently. But, as for the Committee which is organised by the Central Bureau of the Party, for the sole purpose of carrying out certain important actions, that is a different matter. Its relation to the organisation as a whole is both obscure and mysterious, and I have not yet been able to discover anything about it . . . That is to say," he said, interrupting himself, and blinking somewhat foolishly, "I am well on the road to a discovery, as possibly you may have gathered, your Excellency."

The last sentence contained an innuendo from which the Marquis, as he listened, gleaned what seemed to be the first vague explanation of the man's determined insolence. He observed the greatest caution.

"I see," he replied. "So you even know what I gather, Cavaliere? How astounding! But to turn to the other matter — you remember the wishes expressed by our Sovereign Lord, and my general policy for the *Buon Governo* and the Judicial Bench, to the effect that no step on the part of the authorities against the press, the magazines and literary men in general, should be taken without my being consulted, and my consent obtained. It is a question of the fundamental tolerance of the State — of the civilised State which we aspire to be or to appear — towards freedom of speech. Scaleterra is the editor of the leading opposition journal, and not an unknown man. It was your duty, Signore, your plain duty, as my subordinate, to secure my approval of his arrest."

Once more Caminer threw his head back, raising the point of his beard until it was almost horizontal. His expression was one of friendly scepticism, faintly suggestive of an augur's authority, and it seemed silently to insinuate that the superfluous mask which he had long since seen through might be allowed to drop. In a tone of frank familiarity he replied:

"That is all very fine, your Excellency, and I am well aware of the truth of what you say; but you will follow me when I tell you what is apparently a very different fact — that my men yesterday followed Scaleterra on an evening walk to Setignano, and that they lost all trace of him between Setignano and Majano." Here Caminer snorted in secret joy and closed his eyes. "Now, as you know, between Setignano and Majano lies Isola, Princess Corleone's estate."

The Marchese pursed his lips, and tried with a sharp twist of his wrist to fling his cigarette into the bronze bowl. But he was too agitated, and it made him awkward. The cigarette missed its aim and fell to the floor. With an obliging smile Caminer bent down and, carefully picking it up, dropped it somewhat ceremoniously into the bowl.

"Thank you," said del Monte in a low, almost distressed voice, "but I do not like your tone, Caminer. I am not at all

pleased with you. At the present moment your attitude and bearing towards me is menacing."

These unexpected words were spoken so calmly that Cavalier Pompeo's smile died away. He was obviously not offended, but merely surprised, and in his own way brought to a sense of whom he was dealing with, like the fencer who sees the opponent he believed to be exhausted suddenly strike out with an absolutely new technique. He licked his lips, which protruded coarsely from the surrounding hair, and raised his brows. He also raised his shoulders, his arms and his hands, with a slow movement, the ugliness of which was overwhelming.

"I am extremely sorry, your Excellency," he said in extraordinarily subdued tones, "for I know of cases in my own experience, in which the shielding of people has been attempted from above, by the very highest authority. But every man has his passion, your Excellency. And I readily admit to you that I care nothing about the justice or injustice of a cause, not only about . . . about . . ."

He could not light on the word. When he had bent down to pick up the cigarette he had drawn closer to the side of the table, and had remained more or less on the same spot, except that, as he spoke, he moved if anything nearer to his Chief's chair. Del Monte now raised his hand and said rather loudly:

"Pray do not come so close! I don't like it! Get the other side of the table again."

Caminer obeyed at once, and stepped backwards to his former position, while beads of perspiration suddenly made their appearance on his brow. He opened and closed his hands fitfully, and spoke hurriedly:

"That is why I refuse to resign, even if you wish me to. And if you try to force me I demand a disciplinary enquiry to be held. That would not be at all pleasant for you. I cannot therefore help you, your Excellency, as much as I should . . ."

Again he did not complete his sentence, but fixed his eyes on the Minister, whose thin and aged features looked grey as

Caminer forced himself to laugh. Del Monte laughed too, drily and somewhat inanely as an old man laughs.

"Well, what are you talking about?" he exclaimed, a little short of breath, "what are you drivelling about? Have I said a word about your resignation? You are efficient but not congenial, Caminer. After all, it is not your fault that as human beings you and I do not get on together. And I approve of the arrest, *post facto,* you understand? Your reasons convince me of the necessity of the step you have taken, do you follow me? And that should suffice to convince you that you have been talking nonsense. But now relieve me of your presence. You get on my nerves. And I am an old man, Caminer."

The Chief of Police remained standing for a moment speechless, petrified and very grave. Then he bowed and left.

It had been a total defeat!

Towards the evening of that day, which was anything but pleasant for the inmates of the Government Palace, del Monte received a visit from Maria Corleone, whom he had urgently summoned to his private house. The Princess arrived punctually. Somewhat taken aback, the Minister, who, animated by a certain curiosity, had watched her carriage drive up, noticed that she had come in a State coach, and that both the coachman and the two superfluous flunkeys standing on the footboard at the back were wearing the extremely ostentatious livery, well known all over the town, of her pseudo-royal house. That is not a piece of guilelessness on her part, he thought, it is a sort of challenge.

The surprising part of the interview was the Princess' calm demeanour, even when the old statesman became frank and plain. Del Monte was fully aware of his sovereign's attachment to this woman, and had understood it from the beginning. His cup of joy at the sight of a beautiful fellow creature was filled to overflowing by the Princess. For she was not only beautiful but also had a regal bearing. And it was precisely a regal bearing, consciousness of form, dignity and proud assurance, which were essential to del Monte's noble conception of

the beautiful, of which the Princess presented such a perfect example. He appreciated the fact that the Grand Duke, despite the confidence he showed him, and despite the long duration of their work together, had never breathed a word concerning his association with Maria Corleone, never a syllable about the beautiful and profound relationship, the necessity of which for the Prince's equanimity and peace of mind, no one was better able to judge than himself. The discretion shown on each side was in keeping with their natures. But del Monte, who knew mankind, was also aware that, in spite of their attachment and tact, their two temperaments were very different. He understood the enduring quality and the breadth of the monarch's feelings, his loyalty, his manliness, and his constancy carried to the point almost of pedantic inflexibility and wilfulness. But he understood nothing about the woman, at least as far as her relation to the man was concerned. Behind her self-esteem, her rank, and her regard for her royal title, any number of possibilities lurked — and any number of passions also. The old Marchese, who had known many women in his day, but had never mastered a single one of them, who had not even seized with his manly spirit and, as it were reduced to a formula, any that had been worth troubling about, knew only too well why Caminer's information had struck like ice on his skin.

Maria Corleone looked at him with eyes which ever and anon did not please him, with those half-closed eyes which conceal their expression beneath the shadow of their lashes.

"My dear Marchese," she said softly, "do you really imagine that this fellow Caminer is on the point of saving the State?"

Del Monte shrugged his shoulders and replied gravely:

"I think, Princess, that he is unfortunately to some extent justified in stirring up the dust beforehand and in creating confusion and shaking certain institutions."

"And is it necessary for all that to take place in the neighbourhood of Isola?"

"Apparently, yes, Princess."

After a moment's pause the Princess, raising her voice a little, enquired:

"Marchese, do you really think me capable of conspiring against the sovereign whom I love — whom I love, mark you?"

The Minister, with his mouth awry, did not answer at once. Then suddenly he said very gently:

"I cannot say No; truth to tell, Princess, I cannot say No."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and looked steadily at him.

The final outcome of this interview was also remarkable. Maria Corleone pointed out to the statesman, none too clearly it is true, and none too convincingly either, that any connection she mighty have with the political opposition was entirely in the interest of the sovereign.

"This fellow Caminer," she said with a smile, "had better be careful, in case I save the State before he does!"

Del Monte gave no sign of the value he attached to this remark. He said nothing, but sat bent slightly forward, buried in thought, his eyebrows twitching nervously as the somewhat crude and penetrating chimes of the little church of the Madonna delle Grazie, close by, at the end of the bridge by the corner of the Via de' Benci, rang for vespers.

"When do you intend returning to town?" he asked suddenly. Maria Corleone gave a low laugh.

"This week, del Monte. That is a bright, a very bright idea of yours. After all by the end of October, the country begins to pall."

When she left, the Minister, with drawn features, strode thoughtfully up and down the bare room, turning things over in his mind. Then resuming his seat, he at last discovered amid all the darkness and confusion, one bright spot which filled him with hope. A rag and bone man was calling at the top of his voice along the Via de' Benci. His "*Donne chi ha cenci,*" which was almost a wail, rang out to the rhythmical accompaniment of a particular melody, and seemed to cow the none too silent street, and drown its din. For a moment nothing else

could be heard, except the rag and bone man's battle-cry. The Minister knew the caressing voice, dreaded it, and stamped his feet angrily, because he had lost his train of thought. But now the shout had become a distant and not unpleasant cry. The rag merchant knew that del Monte lived round the corner along the Lungarno. Suddenly the Marchese felt in better spirits. He knew not why.

But on the following day he surprised Pompeo Caminer with his cryptic irony and avenged himself for his recent defeat by all manner of thrusts of his polished wit. Hardly opening his eyes, he stabbed the Chief of Police with smoke words as fine as hair. The latter stood before him ruddy and disconcerted.

"Cavaliere," said del Monte at last in nasal tones, "I have to greet you on behalf of a beautiful woman. It is true I do not know whether, if no criminal proceedings are pending, you set much store by beautiful women and their greetings."

"I am a native of Venice!" Caminer rejoined with a grimace.

"Good!" said the Marchese. "The lady in question is a native of Naples and warns you to be on your guard in case she saves the State before you do."

"Not so bad!" said Caminer, with a laugh, and his eyes seemed to bulge out of his head.

"Not so bad!" repeated the Minister emphatically. "And I advise you, Cavaliere, if only for reasons of State, not to rush in at open — at deliberately opened doors. You will get the Order of Merit of St. Joseph without that!"

Caminer was silent, pursing his lips, and hunching his back.

These were pleasant moments for the Marchese, bringing an agreeable recovery of his assurance as a man and as a politician, and a removal of that depression, the recollection of which caused him distress and shame. Whereupon the Grand Duke's Chamberlain arrived with the bald announcement that the Prince had cancelled his visit to Modena and Bologna, and had decided to return by sea; adding the extraordinary command that he was to be given an official reception in which all

the dignitaries of Town and State and the whole garrison were to take part.

2

It was Checca who brought the Guerras the news of Scaleterra's arrest. It had been a hard journey for her, not only because a bold October sun began to blaze down on the high road almost as soon as she passed the Porta a Pinti, but also because, in accordance with her usual practice at critical moments, she had, as a precautionary measure, taken her large basket full of woven straw articles with her as a proof of the innocence of her quest. On this occasion it was not the angry eyes of the Signore she had to fear, but an evil fate in general, the storm that hung over the heads of all of them, even that of the beloved Guerra. Checca was endowed with a sensitiveness which experience had only served to increase almost to the point of infallibility for every sign portending the imminence of political upheavals. During the last few days while her nerves had felt the strain of Guerra's preparations for the coup, she had been conscious of the pressure and movements of the enemy. Gioia's scene with the abbot had started the ball rolling. Full of mistrust born of the sharpness of her own premonitions, and of the uncertainty she felt regarding the results of the previous night's meeting at Isola, she passed the various checking stations of each quarter in the morning — an arrangement ingeniously devised by Guerra whereby a sort of secret post communicated information by a method that none could discover — and at last, at the appointed spot for the group "Piazza," of the Santa Croce quarter, near the altar close by the monumental brass of the Bartolommei family, in the little church of San Stefano a Ponte, she found the note which was to give the alarm. It consisted of a scrap of paper, with two figures on it, one Roman and the other Arabic, indicating the arrest of the group leader. Checca was a creature who could be much more bewildered by her own dark forebodings than by

facts. And she now proceeded to act with a clear head, and a deep sense of responsibility. She hurried to the editorial offices of the paper, where the news was not yet known; but she did not reveal it. She merely prevailed upon one of the clerks, who was a member of the Party, to call at Scaleterra's rooms, and innocently enquire on behalf of the office, the reason of the journalist's absence. On his return he informed her, as she intercepted him in the neighbourhood of the newspaper office, that Scaleterra's rooms were guarded by the police, and that the officials, who were engaged in searching the place, were not at liberty to give him any information regarding the journalist's present whereabouts. That was enough for Checca. She did not hesitate to hurry all the way back to her quarters near the Porta Romana, to fetch her basket, and then, in the blaze of the midday sun, to start off across the town in the direction of Fiesole. Now and again she got a lift for a bit of the way in a peasant's cart travelling in her direction, and drily joined in the chatter about the weather, wine, cheese and oil. Nor was the toil of the day lightened one whit when, on reaching Borgunto at last, she delivered the sad news, and saw neither frowns nor any fitting sign of horror. Instead she noticed other things, which though hardly tangible, were apparent to her keen feminine sensitiveness, and bowed her down, as it were, beneath a fresh load of anxiety. Finally she had heard that command of Guerra's.

Maria Pia, a neighbour's child, the daughter of an ironer, was sitting as usual at the foot of the steps plaiting straw, a white-faced little girl with two blue-black plaits, which hung down to her knees when she stood up, a strange child, who never said a word to Madda, but always waylaid the Signore with her dark look, whenever he passed. For some unaccountable reason, Checca liked her, and, in spite of her fatigue and distress, she smiled at her. Maria Pia uttered a low greeting and followed the woman with her eyes, as with rounded shoulders, flaccid features and open mouth, her hair all dishevelled and her brow perspiring, she shuffled along the open passage and,

in order to avoid knocking, muttered a few words through the kitchen window, which looked out on to the passage close to the front-door.

As usual Madda was in the tiny kitchen, and the Signore, as was his wont at this hour, was resting. The Signorina's face looked strange. Checca felt it immediately; in fact, it looked evil, despite her youth and the lovely mould of her features which was the same as ever. The two little mounds were visible above her small nose, which looked hard and pinched, while her mouth, which could laugh so wonderfully, was hard. "There's more, much more than mere moodiness in this," thought Checca, and she dabbed the corners of her mouth with her handkerchief, as she frequently did when her lungs had been hard worked and a cough threatened. She looked straight into the girl's eyes, which were bright as though with fever; and, by her eyelids, despite their make-up, she knew that Madda must have been crying a good deal during the last few hours.

"Checca? What has happened now?" she enquired mechanically. This indifference also seemed new, although the older woman was already eagerly engaged in trying to fathom the girl's peculiarities that day. Consequently, though she usually trembled in Guerra's presence when she gave a message, she now found herself, to her own surprise, answering quite calmly, almost drily:

"Oh yes, of course — Scaleterra has been arrested!"

Madda looked up, her mouth slightly awry and her eyebrows raised. But she showed no sign of fear; only, possibly, a tinge of contempt. She nodded her head faintly, as if to confirm her own suspicions and prophecies in the matter. Then she turned to the door.

"I'll go and wake Gasto," she said simply, almost coldly, and left the room. Checca collapsed into a chair, stifled a cough, drank some water, closed her eyes, and pondered. All at once she too began to think that the event she had discovered was of little importance. However, she thought no more about it for

the moment but confined her attention to the word "Gasto." For it was the first time that in conversation with her, the Signorina had made use of her brother's Christian name. Checca had a good memory, and she also had her great love. Guerra's Christian name on his sister's lips and at that moment, displeased her — how strange it was! — and Madda's wild eyes displeased her, those hot eyes in a cold face, in an insolent face! And her brain began to get busy with thoughts, which had occurred to her from time to time, but which she had always rejected.

Guerra was already awake when Madda entered. But he was too lazy, lazy through the heaviness of his senses, to get up when he thought he heard voices in the place. He was lying on the large black iron bedstead which occupied the greater part of the small room, and with his head turned to one side, and supported on his hand, was gazing out of the window, which the whim of some architect had quite unnecessarily curved into two pointed arches, and divided in half with a kind of little baroque column. Outside the view of the Mugnone valley seemed narrower, graver and more detached from humanity than the infinite prospect over the Florentine plain, with its calm and godlike serenity, which rejoiced the eye to the south. Nevertheless, the view to the north across the Mugnone valley was also fine, with its scattered houses standing under the protection of cypresses, the white snakelike bed of the river, which was dried up, the rising line of the golden hills, and dark rolling range of the mountains beyond. Guerra smiled faintly as he contemplated the scene, and did not seem to notice his sister enter. But who knew what this man was? He had been so stony, so deaf, so blind all that day, as if he had been struck by the unveiled features of the previous night, as Lot would have been by the burning city had he turned round like his wife to gaze upon it. Madda looked at him. His hair was growing grey over the temples. His skin had gone slightly yellow, and was blue where he shaved; while about his eyes a thousand wrinkles had formed. The girl would gladly

have seen him ugly and worn out. But the first signs of age and the sharpening of his features had only made his face the nobler; for it had been too smooth and too beautiful before. And now his broad brow formed such a bold and manly summit to his clear-cut profile. Madda admitted all this to herself; then closing the door behind her, and speaking not loudly, though her voice sounded hard amid the midday serenity all around, she said:

"Checca is here. Scaleterra has been arrested!"

Guerra winced as though he had been struck, but he continued to look out of the window, and merely frowned. He was really trying to find out whether the landscape had changed at the words he had just heard. But the scene and the midday serenity remained the same as before. His eyes took in the familiar scene as if of their own accord, dispassionately. Men do not matter much, after all, was the thought that flitted through his mind.

Madda interpreted his action differently, and was irritated.

"Your methods work quickly," she said. Guerra turned his head slowly towards her, and it fell back from his hand on to the pillow. He too noticed the change in her face.

"My methods," he retorted calmly, "have already been working for many years, more or less quickly. But they have certainly nothing to do with this case. What do you mean?"

The girl did not answer, but looked across at him. Guerra repeated the words he had used the previous night:

"Poor, poor child!"

But his voice was different. It no longer came from the edge of the abyss. It was a voice of pity from afar. Madda raised her clenched fists to her face, and then pulled them slowly asunder, as if she were tearing something in two.

"Oh let that be—for God's sake let that be!" she panted, her face all flushed. Guerra closed his eyes, and turned his head from side to side on the pillow.

"Madda, let us part!" he pleaded gently.

"No!" she cried impetuously. "No! No!"

Guerra put his hand to the back of his neck and lay still. The flies began to buzz round more fiercely than ever. Even that cry of tortured love had no real existence. Men do not matter much, thought the brother once more. Then the old woman in the kitchen was heard to cough.

"Would you be so kind," said Guerra, with a politeness which at the moment was wounding, "as to call Checca here. I am extraordinarily tired. Or just open the door," he added, and, as the girl did not stir, he continued, "then I will call her myself."

Madda leant against the door, and pressing her head against the woodwork, let her arms hang loosely down, as if her thrice-repeated "Nay" had completely exhausted her. Biting her lips, she stared up at the ceiling and as her lips were painted her teeth became all red, making her look at once cruel and desperate. Guerra, who was now watching her out of the corners of his eyes, made a movement, not so much of impatience as of uneasiness. This seemed to remind his sister of what he had just said, and she suddenly opened the door, though ungraciously pushing it open with her elbows.

"Checca!" cried the man, "Come in!"

Madda, who was still standing on the threshold, did not leave her much room to enter. The door was rather narrow and Checca had to come in sideways, and grazed the girl with her breast and hips as she passed. Then she noticed her heavy breathing and the red teeth. But the touch of her, the sight of her, and her fragrance, made Checca go goose-skin all over. What had happened? Was it the same as with the Corleone woman — was it hate? Was it more than that, was it horror at the sin with which she too was familiar? And now the girl was looking at her very sadly. Checca growing embarrassed bowed her head. Her thoughts had been so terrible that they might well have stirred the other's brain. Who could tell? And was not everything indeed very sad — sin and love, were they really there? And what about the cry of a moment ago, that

"No!" wild, unrestrained, unshakable? What did that "No!" mean?

But the Signore was looking at her in his usual friendly way. How extraordinary and tragic these moments were to her, full of wild and contradictory messages to her heart. The Signore was lying before her in bed — a strange sight! The silk shirt, which had become a little too small for him, allowed his powerful neck to be seen, while one or two wisps of hair had been brushed by the pillow across his brow. He looked both old and young, thought Checca.

He asked her a few questions about Scaleterra's arrest. As usual his questions were brief and thoughtful and formed part of his meditations, which had already advanced beyond the question when it was put; his voice alone was tired. Checca had not much to say in reply; but Guerra seemed relieved to hear that none of the other groups had sent messages of alarm. He was silent for a while; then, without changing his tone, he said to his sister:

"Madda, if they came to fetch me now, I should not run away, neither should I defend myself. Indeed I might even go with them willingly, if I had only myself to consider — and you. That may be your fault. Do you understand, child?"

The girl slowly shook her head.

"We are not alone, remember, Gasto," she said softly.

"We are much too much alone," he replied, and involuntarily seized Checca's hand, as she stood in front of him. "Yes," he continued, "Checca in her life has seen many dark corners, shadows and crannies."

He uttered the strange words with a suggestion of solemnity, as if he were reciting a poem. Madda was trying to say something, possibly something spiteful or sarcastic; but all she did was to open her lips, turn round, and go out of the room, leaving the door open behind her. Checca's blood ran like fire right up to her brow, as the result of his touch on her hand; but she felt no pleasure, only fear. Nor did she speak. Guerra dropped her hand and said:

"Your love is the best, Checca. At least I think so."

He sat up and clasped his raised knee on the bed. Whereupon without any enthusiasm he began to discuss Party business, the result of the previous night's meeting, the impending coup and who was temporarily to take the place of the group leader who had been arrested.

"But won't the arrest of S.B.C." asked Checca, still somewhat bewildered, "have an unfavourable effect on the coup?"

The coup! What was she thinking about? What a strange view she must have of its limited possibilities! He laughed aloud, as it seemed to her, without much reason. Then a new idea occurred to him, or, as she afterwards thought was more probable, his mind was occupied with what he had long since planned. He looked her straight in the face.

"Where is Gioia?" he asked.

The name was bound to be raised. Her lips quivered. She now guessed how the demoniacal scene would end, and add to her burdens. That unfortunate name which, though it meant joy, had shrouded two lives in suffering, had to be thrown up at her again. Her unsteady eyes flitted across Guerra's face, and she answered in a whisper:

"He has disappeared from sight, as you ordered him to yesterday, and as was best after all that has happened."

Without paying much attention to what she was saying Guerra ordered her to see to it that the old man appeared on the streets again, so that he might be arrested (as he undoubtedly would be) and be able to open communications with Scaleterra in the approved style, and act as a medium for instructions.

Checca's hands fluttered high in the air.

"The old man . . . !" she exclaimed aghast. Guerra appeared not to notice these words and talked on. He had important things to say. Checca must be very careful in carrying out his instructions. Perhaps, after all, her pity for her father was not worth much—a feeble impulse at a moment which, in any case, was one of agitation, and which soon died down in

the face of the gravity of the instructions she was going to receive. Then Guerra concluded:

"Just for these few days, Checca, let us spare ourselves any pity."

"How do you mean?" she enquired in surprise.

"Well," he said, with a somewhat forced smile, "when in a few days' time, I have taken the Bargello, there will be no more prison, even for others besides Scaleterra and the old man. I shall not have it destroyed as my fellow revolutionaries destroyed the Bastille in '89. I have too much respect for the Guelphs, who were the first to imprison other people there. I shall make a fine museum of it, Checca."

Checca could not look at him. He speaks like a bad liar she thought sadly.

3

In the Ghetto lived the Jews of scanty means, the poor Jews, and those who only had reasons of their own to appear poor, the Jews of the *"mezza tacca"* as they were called. They consisted of small shopkeepers and merchants, who had their offices, drapers' shops and hardware businesses on the two piazzas of the Via della Nave, and in the adjoining streets and piazzas, where they sold rosaries, crucifixes, and candles more cheaply than they could be bought in the Christian quarters of the town; pedlars, bowed down by the weight on their backs, with sad eyes, ugly beards, crooked legs and unusually long strides, who punctually every morning went out at the open gate of the Ghetto, to sell Dutch linen, valuable foreign coins, bright Aleppo calicos, and cheap stockings, throughout the town and countryside; and finally the people of shady reputations, the invisible beings who like wood-lice lived in the crevices of walls and among whom differences of religion no longer counted — thieves, receivers, prostitutes, card-sharpers and every kind of fugitive, guilty or not guilty, the scum and dregs of the streets.

Such in order of importance were the groups inhabiting the Ghetto, the old and the new Ghetto, or, to put it differently, the Piazza della Fonte and the Piazza della Fraternità, which were joined by a huge crescent-shaped wall. The rich and cultivated Jews, the industrial magnates, bankers and doctors, had their palaces in the town and their villas in the country, like other important families. Many of them even had new coats of arms, or at least new names which sounded above suspicion. The others, those whose names, noses, speech, gestures and prayers were suspicious, the wretches who were content to be usurers and money-changers, together with thousands of miserable, sick, emaciated, jaundiced and care-worn creatures, lived all higgledy-piggledy in those appalling houses, sometimes seven to eleven stories high, which were huddled on top of one another, interlocked and madly entangled, the bane of the unfortunate creatures who inhabited them, chained to their crazy masonry, deprived of air, light, and space, and gradually forced to allow their lungs to be crushed between their walls.

The Ghetto had three gates, one leading to the Mercato Vecchio, close to the fish market, the other to the Via della Nave, and the third to the Piazza del' Olio. All three were closed at midnight, and opened again at five in the morning. Spies alone had access to the Ghetto at all hours of the day and night, in order to search out suspicious characters; and although their efforts were usually vain, their activity was a sufficient reason to keep Gioia, the beggar, from appearing in the street even after dark.

He lived in the old Ghetto, which was even fouler, stuffier, and more dangerous than the new, in the centre of a maze of houses known as the "Cortacce," the most terrible part of the whole Jewish quarter, which with ghastly symbolism and mockery had been built upon the walls of the ancient Gran Postribulo, the great brothel of the trecento. It was such an amorphous conglomeration, that very few of the three hundred inhabitants were familiar with all its secret corners, passages and stairs, or possessed any clear idea of its plan, with all its

added wings, its connecting galleries and underground corridors, leading to buildings by no means contiguous. There were really only two of the inmates who knew every twist and turn of the labyrinth, and they were Gioia and his host, who was also the owner of the building. The Party, however, possessed a remarkable, and to uninitiated eyes utterly incomprehensible, sketch of the property, and the houses connected with it, the most extreme offshoot of which stood in the Via della Nave, outside the walls of the Ghetto. And by means of this sketch, though her visits were far from frequent and always fleeting, Checca knew the God-forsaken pile no less intimately than the other two.

Gioia was not the only man to feel at ease in the " Cortacce." His sense of security was shared by Salomone, his landlord, who, like many a Ghetto Jew, was also a Carbonaro and in a sense the revolutionary leader of the community, although, for tactical reasons, he was excluded from the actual work of the Party, and his political importance ended with his ownership of this maze of brickwork and his function as a refuge for all the members of the Party who suddenly found themselves in danger. Nevertheless the gaunt, jaundiced and bony-chinned man of fifty, with his high shoulders and flat feet, was an extraordinary character in his detached and, so to speak, mysterious contentedness, which was naturally very different from Gioia's need of peace. Salomone was a slaughterer, the most popular poultry-vendor of the community, and the only dealer in horse-flesh in the Ghetto, while he also had a good connection in horse-flesh with an exclusively Christian clientele. He was probably extremely rich. But certainly no pleasure connected with making or possessing money accounted for his contentedness; for he spent but little on himself, had no family, gave away large sums unostentatiously to the poor, whom, on feast days he clothed and fed by the dozen, while he also contributed heavily to the funds of the Party. He was full of obscure satisfaction with his own existence, as well as animated by a mystic hope of some great good fortune, which was neither to

befall himself alone, nor to be of an entirely religious or spiritual character, but was to take the shape of a local political upheaval, the advent, as it were, of a private Messiah for his Florentine Ghetto. His ideas and desires on this subject certainly assumed a more definite shape when he thought of the great Guerra, — he had seen and spoken to him once, when the leader had summoned him, in his capacity as the Party representative of Jewry, to an interview, — but his deep and enduring love for Guerra and his devotion to the aims of the Party, he revealed to no man, not even to Gioia.

Salomone was the only person with whom Gioia occasionally exchanged a word or two. He esteemed him, because he was one of the few men in his hard life who had treated him well, and even shown him respect. It was no longer possible for the old man to contract a real friendship, or even the kind of friendship to which his landlord in his quiet way seemed frequently to aspire. He was too tired, too crooked, too humiliated for that. But just recently, when, after the fatal thumb parade, he had run the dangers of the streets and had received the welcome order to vanish from the sight of men, he had accepted some wine from Salomone, who had a keen eye, and had put up with his company for a whole evening. Nay more, he had got greedily drunk, and had prattled about Checca, fat Lionello and the five-lire piece he had been given. Suddenly, with burning eyes, Salomone exclaimed:

"The hour is at hand, Sor Benedetto, the longed for hour! He is bringing it to us, and he won't be anything like an old man when it comes . . ."

"What — what — who? . . ." Gioia gibbered, looking up suspiciously. Salomone held out his mug.

"To his health, Sor Benedetto, long life to him, who is the life of us all!"

"No!" cried Gioia, in brutal drunken tones. Then pushing the wine from him, he said not another word. Salomone smiled quietly to himself, and soon afterwards took his departure.

The following day was as beautiful and pleasant as the old

man could wish. He had been able to sleep — that too was a godsend — for the strong wine had numbed the pain in his bones. When he awoke that day he knew that no bell would drive him hither and thither, whether to Santa Croce, to the Lungarno, or to the Piazza, to be infected with Checca's bewildering zeal, to receive orders to shuffle for hours over the cobble stones, to be on the alert, and to be anxious and full of pain; for his aches and pains always increased when he moved. He was free, and protected by the walls of the Jewish quarter, by the misery, contempt, outlawry, confusion — aye, even the stink of other men. He loved the "Cortacce" and its veil of night, of filth and misery, as a bulwark against his tormentors. And for the same reason he valued the Jews, though he did not let them know it. He was happy today, and hummed a singsong to himself, and even gave vent to a sort of indistinct whistling, while from the savoury smells which penetrated into his lair from Salomone's kitchen close by, he soon learnt what he could expect to eat. For the *Padrone,* as he called his goodnatured landlord, in grateful return for the latter's invariably respectful "Sor Benedetto," or "Signor Gioia," gave him good food in plenty when he spent the whole day at home.

Then the old man took his stool, carried it to the open passage in front of his lair, opposite the barred and ever dark and broken window of the house opposite, and sat down. The little patch of sky above was burning with the sun. Gioia hated the sun, for it was not one of the least, but only one of the most usual torments of his daily life. But here, in the "Cortacce," it left him cold in both senses of the word. It did not even hurt his eyes, and hardly ventured lower than the dilapidated gutter of the little piece of roof he could see above his head. Gioia was content that it should be so. He sat hidden away between the twisted tangle of walls, where no one could find him, neither his fellow creatures, the sun, nor the streets. Even the noise, like that of a continual downpour of rain was another form of protection against the outside world. He was not disturbed by all the cries, murmurs, singing and bawling, for he did not

hear them. Lost in thought, as in a dream, with swaying beard and gleaming eyes, he heard only the music in his own heart, the remnants of a language which was once alive but now so very far away — when things were different. He saw the music, the technique of the violinist, and his own hands, which had once been slim and attractive, with their fleshy finger bulbs — good hands for violin work; he saw them doing double fingering, runs, arpeggios, trills, cantilenas, on the dark brown finely grained wood of his old violin; plunging into wondrous combinations of melodies, mad bravuras — he laughed to himself; then followed distinct bars from the Marseillaise; again he laughed, even when the music suddenly stopped, and left his thoughts to themselves, his thoughts of revolutions, old and new revolutions, and of the impending coup — the devil! They don't need me any longer! I shall sit here and leave them to shoot one another outside. That's good, that's excellent; they won't find me here. Checca finds me, of course . . ."

Checca arrived just as his second day was drawing to its glorious close in the same way as the first. He was still sitting in the front passage when the door of his lair was opened. As Salomone never entered without saying a few polite words, and knocking several times, and as except for him no one in the house ever entered his room, the old man knew at once that it was his daughter. If he had been young and active, he thought, he would have jumped up quickly, and run along the passage, and plunged into some other door or aperture in the wall. . . . And his thoughts were still, almost playfully, engaged with the various ways of escaping her, when she stood before him. He leant his head against the wall at his side and closed his eyes. He wanted to avoid looking into her stern and zealous face. Neither did he wish to listen to what she had to say.

"Good evening!" she said. He made no answer.

"Good evening!" she repeated in louder tones.

"I swear you are not bringing me a good evening, Checca," he murmured, rolling his head from side to side against the wall. Checca waited so long before answering that he opened

his eyes and looked at her. She looked griefstricken, not bristling with unwelcome orders. But it might be only the effect of the light.

"Are you ill?" she enquired. That was a strange question, and he examined her face carefully.

"No," he replied, "or not worse than usual. But why do you ask?"

Checca did not reply, but told him to come back with her into the room. She always did this when she brought orders. Gioia did not stir.

"Come in!" she repeated. The old man closed his eyes, and pressed closer to the wall.

"I can't stand up," he said. Once more Checca was silent for a little while as if she were hesitating. And then she asked again.

"Are you ill?"

"Yes," he said, and suddenly with a wail he whispered her name: "Checca! Checca! Checca!"

"I'll help you," she said, and caught him under the arms. Gioia cried out.

"I am in pain," he whimpered; "it hurts where you touched me; when you are near me I am always ill!"

Checca remained standing in front of him and pondered, looking so patient that tears sprang to the bewildered eyes of the old man — not tears of sadness, but tears which came in his effort to make every possible appeal to her strange pity.

"I might call Salomone," said Checca thoughtfully, "he wouldn't hurt you for worlds."

Gioia was silent.

"But I can tell you as you are," she added quickly; and bending over his ear, she whispered into it for some time. Gioia blinked once or twice; then closing his eyes, he merely moved his chin as if he were chewing something. Checca had come to the end of her instructions.

"Have you understood what I said?" she asked. He simply waved his gigantic thumb about, as if he were too weak to

reply, and said nothing. She touched his arm and he looked at her.

"I am quite deaf, Checca," he murmured. "I hear nothing . . . I hear nothing."

Checca dropped her arms.

"Did I hear you say *Babbo?*" he asked with sudden cunning. "That's no use any longer!"

She gave a little shake of her head.

"This is bad — this is bad," she muttered. Gioia repeated:

"That's no use any longer, Checca. I am old — I have forgotten everything . . . do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," she said. The old man began to tremble in every limb, but he did so very awkwardly and unconvincingly.

"It gets worse and worse the longer you stay here," he declared, "but the moment you go I feel better."

Checca looked at the ground as if she had been scolded. And then she left. Gioia gazed up to the patch of sky with its group of stars. He felt in an extraordinary frame of mind; but it was not joy. He was disquieted by his unexpected victory of the previous moment. Or was it no victory? Or was a victory a thing that did not suit him? There was less noise about him because the evening was cool and the inmates above and below had closed their tumbledown doors and windows. The old man was annoyed by this diminution of the friendly familiar sounds; it was as if the people about him were moving away from him, and leaving him to his fate. Sad and distressed, he rose with a sigh and pushed the stool into the room, and after a moment's hesitation, closed the door. The evening was no longer kind. Why did they want to communicate with him again? He lit the candle and thumped on the wall. Salomone brought him his dinner, a good dinner, as usual, consisting of roast pigeons as large as chickens. Gioia watched him suspiciously. Had Checca been speaking to him — and had it been only about his alleged illness? He would have liked the Padrone to express his customary wishes for a good appetite. But Salomone, who had laid the tin plate on the little table near

Gioia's bed, still leant against the foot of the bed, rocking his head and body from side to side, as he always did when he wanted to have a chat. Gioia thought that plain signs of ill-temper and a sigh of pain might be allowed to escape him, and paid no attention to his visitor.

"Memorable times, important times!" exclaimed Salomone, still rocking to and fro. "I tell you, Sor Benedetto, these are memorable times!" Gioia ate noisily without saying a word. He was not even aware of enjoying his food.

"They will leave no one in peace," continued Salomone, looking down at him, "not even those who have had the good fortune to bring them to pass."

The old man pushed his plate away and coughed loudly. Salomone waited a moment to give him time to speak. And when Gioia only whimpered faintly, his landlord said:

"As a fellow conspirator, I almost envy you, Sor Benedetto; as your personal friend — I hope I may call myself that — I pity you, as I would like to see you left in peace."

Gioia turned round and answered rudely:

"What are you driving at, Salomone? I don't understand what you're talking about."

"Well, well," said the landlord with a laugh, "the Signorina was here, Sor Benedetto, and not only did she see you, but she also saw me. She also collected some money, and signed the receipt with the sign indicating a state of emergency. So the conclusion is obvious."

The fact that Salomone called Checca "Signorina" was due not merely to courtesy but to his deep respect for her position in the Party, and her relation to the great Guerra. As Salomone had dealings almost exclusively with her; as, moreover, she collected subscriptions, gave instructions, and quietly and regularly visited old Gioia, and made him do her bidding, always in the name of the Party of which she was almost the only visible sign, he could not help over-estimating her importance, without ever suspecting the mean and tragic background behind so much zeal. Nevertheless, for

the moment, he apparently knew nothing of her conversation with her father, and only guessed the orders she had for him. Gioia swayed his head sullenly from side to side. He was glad that his host had not come either to persuade him or draw him out. But the mention of a state of emergency remained fixed in his brain and awakened his sense of discipline. He knew the meaning of it only too well. And he groaned, this time in genuine anguish.

"It can't be helped," said Salomone softly, "every one must be at his appointed post, and every one must do what he thinks best." Suddenly the Padrone began to sing, and raising his hands, uttered words of strange solemnity in terribly garbled Italian. "He hath obtained the power over us from the Eternal Father, for from the Eternal Father hath he received his great office!" Then came a few sentences in the crude exalted tones of his people, which always terrified the old man. "That's how the old God Himself roars," he thought. Salomone was already smiling again and his brows were raised. "Will you have some more wine, Sor Benedetto?" he inquired.

"No!" Gioia rejoined rudely. "I want to go to sleep. For tomorrow I shall have to . . ."

He said no more, so horrified was he at the words he had just uttered. What was he to do? The whole night long he thought it over. And, as he did not sleep, he had time for thinking. There was no peace for the wicked, no Ghetto, no Jews, no labyrinth and no squalid "Cortacce" to act as a bulwark and defence. The great evil will broke through just as the sun breaks through the compassionate shade of a cloud or of a tree. The great evil will made room for the punishment meted out by the great Guerra, whom he had not yet seen. That was the power that controlled his life, and was still directing it hither and thither. His life and Checca's life. And if the punishment did not come today, it would surely come tomorrow. And Checca was kind today — she was still good-looking. And tomorrow she might be so nasty! Or she would have to quit

this life altogether, with many more besides, if he failed to obey his call to duty. How sad she had been today! But the willing worker always had a good Checca to deal with and at times shelter and peace, welcome peace!

Such was the upshot of his simple reasoning.

On the following morning he got up and left betimes, according to orders, and trod the path he had been told to tread. Salomone pressed a coin into his hand as he left, and gave him a friendly significant nod. At the gate leading to the Mercato various pedlars and hawkers greeted him as they passed out with him. Gioia was in good spirits, glowing in the respect that had been paid him. But outside the gate, in the noisy tumult of the preparations for the day's market, things were different; for the clumsy industry of the crowd had no eyes for him, and he paid no more heed to them than was necessary to avoid the careless slashing of their whips, the wheels of their carts, and the hind legs of their donkeys. He could not make the slightest impression on all this bustle; moreover, had he not his own duties which were far more important than all the fussy activities about him?

He lurched past the slender pillars of the graceful fish market on the Via Pelliceria, where the linen weavers, the copper smiths, the bakers and the cloth merchants were putting up their stands. The streets were still shrouded in the early mist of the morning. The old man pushed his glasses up on his brow, a thing he rarely did. His eyes had no lashes, they were blood-shot and red rimmed, and the lower lids bulged. His face without the glasses looked naked and pitiful. But the moist air soothed the lids that were always burning. And if heat and dust were to follow, his glasses would be all the more pleasant as a protection. One had to adapt oneself. There was a welcome crispness in the cool air, and in the busy movements of the noisy eager people about him. Gioia hummed to himself as he went along, turned to the right towards the Via Porta Rossa, and halted at the very ancient Mangano, the public mangle, which rolled out of a dark archway like a tongue

issuing from a black mouth. He considered the route he should take and the time table he should follow. His begging hand was stretched out, modestly and respectfully, from mere habit, and not because he expected anything. He gazed thoughtfully, though with unseeing eyes, at the paved quadrangle of the Piazza di Monte di Pietà close by, hemmed in by houses, out of which a number of narrow streets ran like little streams. But he saw in his mind's eye all the alleys, cross-roads, passages, and corners, which he would have to traverse in order to reach the banks of the Arno, where he would have to walk up stream and wander from Santa Croce into the busy streets and on to the Piazza, until he — yes, until . . .

Then suddenly at a time when it was most unusual for such a thing to happen and in a place where charity was rare, he was given alms, a substantial sum, another silver coin; and the hand that gave it to him pressed his own in a friendly, almost tender way. Checca looked at him kindly, and whispered something in his ear. He was to pull his glasses down over his eyes, otherwise people would hardly know him. And she added quite softly and kindly: "*Babbo mio.*" It sounded quite different from the "*Babbo*" of former days, which was like a stick held up to strike. Gioia looked delightedly into his hand full of riches. He did not dare to follow his daughter with his eyes. But his heart was beating with joy. He pulled his glasses down — how glad he was to do it too! — and entered on his beat.

It was late in the afternoon when, on the Piazza del Granduca, where he had been wandering about continually, almost to the point of exasperation, and begging insolently, a tall fat *Capo agente* recognised him and hurrying up roared in unnecessarily loud tones:

"Hi, you old rascal, we've been looking for you for a long while!"

Gioia lurched obediently forward at his side. Close by one or two dragoon officers with monstrous helmets and huge swords were cracking bad jokes, while a few compassionate

working women walked muttering abuse behind the police officers, whose numbers had quickly increased to about half a dozen, among whom the little cripple was completely swallowed up.

4

Four days later, Renzo Maddii, the printer, who was Gioia's liaison officer with the Princess, and at the same time kept watch over her on Guerra's behalf, came from Settignano up to Borgunto in order to inform the leader of Maria Corleone's return to the city. Guerra seemed to be glad to hear the news, and asked for a report of the last few days which, he said, had not been without importance. Renzo described in a brief and business-like manner how on the morning after the secret conference a dog-cart had left Isola at an unusually early hour, and had returned in the morning with Baron Steiner; furthermore, how the Princess herself had driven in the afternoon in her state coach with its liveried footmen in the direction of the city and had returned in the evening, and that, according to one of the footmen, she had visited del Monte's Palace. In addition to the regular visits of the Baron and one visit from her husband, the Prince, the Princess, on October the 12th had also received a short visit from a priest who was not her confessor.

"Tall and fat? A secular priest?" Guerra enquired, absorbed in what he heard. Renzo replied in the affirmative.

On the same day, and only a few seconds later, Checca arrived. She had been to Borgunto only the previous day, to report that Gioia, who had fortunately not been placed in solitary confinement, but had been treated as a vagrant and put in the wing of the Bargello alongside the Via Sant' Apollinare, had managed secretly to communicate the fact that he had already met Scaleterra, and that the latter had understood his message. Guerra received her sternly, for, in order to avoid suspicion, he had told her not to come any more during the

period of tension preceding the coup. He himself had decided to go that evening to Pratolino, a place in the hills north of Fiesole, in order to await the courier from the Bologna group, who was to bring the decisive news. But his sternness was assumed, for he knew very well that the news he was expecting could perfectly well reach him by another route. Nevertheless her face surprised him, for it wore an expression not of agitation at an unexpected announcement, but of sorrow.

"As urgent as all that?" he observed curtly; and with a sudden feeling of shame he avoided looking at her. Checca nodded.

"Most urgent," she replied, in a calm undertone. "Nothing could be more urgent, Signore. Pistoia has signalled by heliograph from the Bologna group that the Grand Duke has not gone to Modena."

"Oh!" said Guerra, and turning away slightly, he thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He found it impossible to show any greater signs of surprise. And what was driving him, forsooth, to dissimulate in front of this old woman? Suddenly he raised his head and looked at her. "Well?" he enquired aggressively. "What conclusions do you draw from that?"

She became embarrassed; for at that moment she perceived that she could not break away from him, either from aversion or indignation—nor was there yet any trace of aversion or indignation in her mind. He had twined himself too fast about her heart. Life had been too miserly of love for her, and she refused to surrender one iota of the love that had become hers with so much pain. But her heart bled for Gioia, and she was even more grieved at Guerra's clumsy lie, when ordering the old man to get arrested and taken to the Bargello. But behind it all there probably lay a purpose, the great purpose of his position. Who was she to criticise?

"The conclusion I draw from it," she replied, in a much more humble tone than she had used a moment before, "is that the Grand Duke has been warned."

He looked kindly at her, much more kindly than her matter-

of-fact remark warranted. He seemed satisfied, and she could not endure his radiant smile, no, not even now. He also took her hand; his friendliness and his gestures bore but little relation to their conversation, and she grew hot all over with confusion.

"Do you definitely suspect anyone, Checca?" he asked.

"Yes, Signore," she replied without a moment's hesitation. He shook his head slowly.

"Your suspicions are false," he said gently, "you must not allow your mind to think along such channels. Maria Corleone did not warn him."

Checca looked helplessly to the floor. "Why does he say that?" she asked herself in anguish. "Whom did he think of accusing, whom did he think of exonerating? What manner of man was he — a bad man?"

"These are all tests of what we can bear," said Guerra, as if to himself, as if he were reading aloud. Whereupon he gave the orders which were necessary to meet the new situation — the conclusion of the state of emergency for the Tuscan Branch, the cancelling of all arrangements for the coup, a fresh organisation of the means of communication between him and the group leaders and of other expedients, which might have become known to the police. They were all orders which gave evidence of having been thought out long before. Checca did not leave at once.

"Scaleterra — Gioia . . ." she reminded him at last. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I am very sorry for them," he said indifferently, "but what can be done? Possibly one might do something," he added, deep in thought. "And the Bargello will be a museum yet, you will see!"

Checca made no reply, and as she had already turned towards the door, he did not see her face. Outside she listened for any sound in the kitchen. Guerra understood.

"The Signorina is not well," he said, in tones which allowed of no retort.

Truth to tell Madda was in bed. Whether she were ill, seriously upset, or merely moody, Guerra neither knew nor wished to know. During the last few days she had performed only the most urgent household duties, and then gone to bed. She looked ill, and Guerra was kind to her. But it was a frigid kindness that hurt them both. Nevertheless he had not yet lost the horror he had felt on the edge of the abyss that night. He kept to himself and let her suffer. "What is the meaning of it?" he asked himself constantly, and did so again now, as he went to her. It seemed to him that he lay like a nightmare over all those who loved him or were bound to him; even over his own life he lay like a nightmare. "And yet," he thought, "can I really say that I feel wretched today?"

Madda's little room was next door to the kitchen. Its small window, veiled by the fly net, looked out on to the passage, as did the kitchen window. The room was quite quiet. The girl, who was lying half-dressed on her bed, did not stir. The only sound to break the stillness was the song Maria Pia was singing outside as she sat knitting, while from the scullery, which was level with the road, came the murmur of women's voices. Madda's arms and shoulders were bare, and her hair was loose. "There's some affectation about this," he thought; "that is my sister."

"How are you?" he enquired cheerfully, and sat down on the edge of the bed. "Renzo was here a moment ago," he continued, "and Checca too. Did you hear them?"

She said nothing. He stroked her arm gently with two fingers and spoke softly, so that he might not be heard outside.

"As the Grand Duke, whether as the result of a warning, or of some unaccountable whim, has cancelled his visit to Modena . . ."

"Bravo!" she interrupted, without looking at him, "well done, Gasto." But he did not allow himself to be diverted from his purpose, and continued to stroke her.

"Quite so," he said, "this time I have succeeded in defeating the false and absurd tactics of the Central Bureau. It may

also have been cowardice on my part. I don't care. I am only brave when people are looking on, and when it is worth while. The great Santarosa spoke to me more or less to that effect nine years ago, but his courage did not prove much worth while, and he died a martyr for Greece. How could that help the cause of Italian Independence? In no way whatsoever! I shall give you further examples of my opportunism in courage — you wait."

"I am more patient than I thought," said Madda softly.

"I am glad of it," he replied, and turned her face gently towards him. "Now certain changes have become necessary. Our situation is very difficult, very dangerous. You are at liberty to note the two senses in which my words can be taken, Madda. Ought we not to defend ourselves, child?"

She looked anxiously and tremulously at his mouth.

"So you're sending me away, Gasto?"

"Great events are imminent," he said with a smile, "they may be amusing; they may be tragic. But, little sister, that's the sort of thing we like! Maria Corleone has been clever enough to return to the city. She will also be clever enough to see that she must remain accessible to us. You must go to her and keep her company for a while, on the pretence of being some cousin or other from Naples. You must paint yourself up and dye your hair red. You have had enough practice in making your face look different. What you want, child, is distraction and responsibility. And I guarantee you both."

Madda looked at him with an expression which was at once so searching, so tender, so wicked, wild and terrified, and she contrived to put so many feelings into her endless, shameless stare that Guerra at last laid a hand over her eyes. She remained quite motionless beneath his touch. Outside Maria Pia of the long plaits was still singing. She had a pretty little voice, and a remarkable knowledge of up-to-date songs, which she sang through all their verses. Madda began to laugh to herself, though she held his hand tight when he tried to draw it away. He looked at the laughing mouth, which was all he could see

of her face. The upper lip, which was a trifle too short, though this made it all the more fascinating, was lifted to reveal her teeth. The corners of her mouth quivered malevolently; her teeth were very white, and her lips were painted red. As he contemplated her show of apparent independence, he was forcibly reminded of the cruelty of beautiful animals. It also occurred to him that to the extent to which she was more of an animal than he was, she was also more unaccountable. He pulled his hand away before she knew what he was about. She glared at him beneath frowning brows, and looked as though she were determined not to speak. Then suddenly she laid her hands on her breasts, as if all at once she had become conscious of the scantiness of her attire.

"And what about you?" she enquired with a laugh. "You will remain here, of course?"

"As long as I can do so more or less in safety — yes," he replied calmly.

"And I suppose Maria Pia will do your bed for you, eh, Gastino?"

"I had thought of that already."

"Oh," she wailed, in a high-pitched voice, "you get on with the Marias — the lion-hearted Marias, and the pious Marias! In spite of the dilemma, it is significant that you are not young enough for a woman and not old enough for a child."

Guerra paid no heed to her innuendo, which was not decent; but merely bowed his head over her hands, kissed them and said:

"Oh you poor Magdalena!"

"Oh we poor Magdalenas!" she repeated, with the tears in her eyes. But she was not crying; and pursing her lips, her mouth soon looked thin and wicked.

5

The 17th of October was a restless day in the city. Neither the people nor the authorities knew precisely why. For nothing

happened, at least nothing remarkable, except for a few free fights, stabbing affrays, and isolated encounters between the students and the German soldiers. But the air was electric, nerves were highly strung, and everybody seemed to be expecting they knew not what. Vague rumours circulated round the cafés, the shops, the restaurants, the booths in the market-places, and the beer-bars; misty assumptions without any backbone to them, and innumerable imprecations which were supposed to restore equanimity to the crowd. Nobody knew what all the excitement was about. The members of the Party who understood — and they were certainly not few in number, though forced to discretion both by their oath and the control they were under, and informed by their group leaders that the coup had miscarried, marvelled at this aftermath of a storm which had never burst.

Don Lionello Vacca, who was endowed with the most subtle sensitiveness for apprehending any commotion in the nervous system of the city, noticed the extraordinary unrest that had no meaning or apparent cause, when he took his early walk through the heart of the city. At the proper time he sauntered over to the Café del Giappone, where the revolutionaries were accustomed to meet. But he found extraordinarily few customers there; for the Radicals who frequented the place were still engaged communicating the new instructions they had received from their group leaders right and left, and were, moreover, aware of Guerra's orders that they should not allow themselves to be seen much in public during the course of the next few days. The Abate was too shrewd, however, not to draw his own private conclusions from the empty tables. He reckoned up the number of faces which he recognised as being in any way suspect, and was at the same time annoyed at his own uncertainty and ignorance, which tallied with the lack of success attending his manœuvres of the last few days. Whilst that infernal Caminer still continued to keep the Radical Scaleterra, and latterly too, the ill-omened beggar, in gaol, he himself had discovered a lady at Isola, who had straightway

unmanned him by her beauty (this was his trouble with woman) and had listened to his appeal with unutterable haughtiness. Whereupon she had bidden a lackey show him the door and the man had handed him two gold pieces for the Franciscan nuns of San Niccolo. That was the first fiasco. As for that God-forsaken Carbonaro cripple in the Bargello, who bore the name of Gioia as a sort of living blasphemy of God, and who was obviously an out and out rogue, he had in the course of a short examination, which he had interspersed with all manner of edifying and uplifting remarks, been able to extract no more than the Chief of the Police himself had done. In short the Abate was in a bad mood and thirsted for blood. Pushing his giant form through the elegant throng which used to gather under the sheltering roof of the principal post office, at the end of their customary stroll through the Via Calzaiuoli — even they looked unusually restless and inquisitive he thought — he finally resolved to make his report to Caminer appear a little blacker than necessary. Towards midnight, patrols of grenadiers and chasseurs were already marching through the streets, and the mass of spies that swarmed over the town led even those who had hitherto regarded the general unrest about them with a certain scepticism to expect an event that never happened. For after all, the fact that towards evening the Gonfaloniere on behalf of the Town Council, and the Commandant of the place on behalf of the garrison, clad in parade dress, announced that the Grand Duke and his family had disembarked at Rimini, and would enter the City in state on the 19th of October, and then recited the arrangements for his reception, could hardly be called an event, and was certainly no adequate compensation for all the feeling of suspense that had been in the air.

On the festal day it rained with spiteful stubbornness and regularity. On account of the physical exertion alone, old Marchese del Monte had a rooted objection to state receptions, parades, and royal welcomes, and was all the more puzzled by his sovereign's whim, seeing that, to his constant delight, the

Grand Duke had always expressed himself as being similarly opposed to sensational ceremonial appearances in public. Reminded by the wet weather of the Duke's oft-repeated injunction not to risk his health on unimportant occasions of the kind, he was therefore awaiting the procession in the Pitti Palace, sufficiently annoyed at having to stand in his court dress, stiff with gold, unavoidable though it was. Meanwhile the Florentine grandees and their wives, together with the leading officials, Court dignitaries and officers, and Members of the City Council, were cursing both aloud and under their breath, and damning both heaven and Austria for obliging them to ruin their Court attire and perhaps their health as well in open state coaches. The three unfortunate honourable Chamberlains indeed, a certain Prince Rospigliosi, Marchese Capponi and Senator Antinori, who were obliged to meet the grand-ducal family at La Pietra, wore the tragic expressions of men on the eve of battle.

To the astonishment of all, the Grand Duke himself was the only one present who made light of the ceremony, for he made his entry in a plain, closed travelling coach. The Gonfaloniere of Florence, a wealthy gentleman with a long beard, whose two ostrich plumes hung sadly dripping over his cocked hat, was obliged at the Porta San Gallo to poke his head through the somewhat narrow window of the coach in order to pronounce his speech of welcome, and saw little more of his sovereign than a hand in a brown leather glove, a sleeve and the collar of his travelling cloak, and for a second the kind rather tired face, from which a curt "Thank you" was heard. The other gentleman must certainly have seen much less, and as for the soldiers, who stood shoulder to shoulder from the City Gate to the Palazzo Pitti, the majority saluted, not the mud-bespattered carriage, in spite of its escort of lancers — but the coach and four, containing sullen officials which followed it. The crowd, which had collected in large numbers at the Gate on the Ponte Santa Trinità and the Piazza Pitti, also cheered chiefly at the sight of the popular Florentine aristocrats, and

shouted their welcomes at the wrong carriage. Even the salute of guns in the Fortezza da Basso suffered from the rain, and the fireworks which the magistrate of the city was to have let off in the evening on the Ponte alla Carraia, could not even be set. The city, which was still enervated, and a prey to dark forebodings, regarded this return of the Prince as a bad omen. The rumour, already a week old, that the New French Government would not only countenance a revolution in Italy, but would actually promote it, gained fresh life, and at least afforded belated grounds for the general unrest.

At the very first interview the Grand Duke had with del Monte, on the day of his arrival, he expressed himself in terms so unequivocal regarding the political situation that, despite all his previous anxiety, the Minister was taken by surprise. The old man was just endeavouring to frame his greeting in suitable language when the sovereign, seizing him by the arm, led him to the library.

"Stop that, my dear friend, for Heaven's sake!" he said, closing the door. "I am sure that you feel as little inclined to be rhetorical as I do in my soaking city."

And he glanced hastily round the room which he loved more than any other. As his eye wandered over the shelves to see that his books were still safe and sound, he jerked his head in the masterful and at the same time human and interested manner which was peculiar to him. The Minister, who had not seen his master for four months, availed himself of the excellent opportunity to observe him and to study physiognomy, in which he had some belief, and the verdict of which, at the moment, he was, for various reasons, somewhat curious to know. The Grand Duke was not actually handsome, nor was his narrow shouldered figure altogether in keeping with Florentine taste. But the dignity, intelligence and noble serenity of his face, which was more round than oval, his pure brow, with the fair hair parted youthfully on one side, his clear, deep eyes, and his wonderfully fair, rippling though haughty brows, his manly and sonorous voice, his beautiful, well-shaped

hands, bore such convincing testimony to the exalted nature of the man, that his short and rather broad nose, his undersized chin retreating between his whiskers, and his protruding lower lip, the heritage of his ancient house, could not combine to make him appear either ugly or mean. The fact that the doubtful nature of his reception, and the anything but encouraging outlook for the future had not in any way changed or clouded his features, or affected either their nobility or serenity, and that even the signs of fatigue after his journey pointed to the equanimity of his soul, revived the joy the Marchese had always felt in his master's presence, and rekindled the love peculiar to himself, which, as he felt at this moment, was absolutely essential to his own mental balance. Then they had their brief interview — for the Court was waiting for the procession which had been announced to take place in the Quartiere delle Stoffe of the Palace — in which many unexpected things were said; for their common anxiety throughout was more oppressive than del Monte at that intimate moment could have believed possible.

The Grand Duke dropped into the large red armchair in front of the writing-table, and smiled as if to himself.

"You are even less inquisitive, del Monte," he said kindly, "than I took you to be. What did you conclude from my sudden desire for a sea trip? And what did you make of this ridiculous entry into my capital and home?"

The Minister had a vague feeling that, at that moment, his own and the Prince's fight for the security of the State and the dynasty was about to begin, a fight for life. He was conscious that his heart was no longer young and that he was becoming aware of a sensation of alarm at his age and weakness; and, in relentless association with these ideas, his thoughts flew back to the first man who had shaken his faith in himself — Caminer. The Bargello was right, his calling was right, his flaming existence was right!

"I now know, your Royal Highness," he replied very gravely, "that I was mistaken when I thought that no external

influences but only personal preference lay behind this desire. But I do not know the deeper reasons."

"No, you do not know them, dear friend," said the Prince, turning his face slowly towards the Minister, "neither do I for that matter — I mean not the deeper reasons, but only the external influences, as you called them. But, as a matter of fact, they directed my personal preference. The fact is that there was a plot to shoot me at some point along the proposed land route. I must either be very simple or very arrogant, but 'pon my soul, I cannot make out why."

He brought the palm of his hand down heavily on the table and exclaimed in a louder almost distressed voice:

"Why, *amico mio,* why? I do not ask as a man, although I love my life as a man. I ask as a sovereign, as one who knows that in the drama of royalty, worse sovereigns than I usually step the boards."

Del Monte was greatly alarmed. Political nemesis had suddenly approached and possibly touched them. It almost robbed him of his senses. To create distance was the secret of his statecraft and the constant object of his personal contact with men. Proximity hampered him. The hostility of the Age, which at a distance he knew how to fight with ease and assurance, horrified him when it sprang upon him like a wolf.

"There is no Why, your Highness!" he exclaimed excitedly. "The very question is a humiliation. Besides there have been madmen in every Age. And it is always possible that the warning, which you did right to follow, had no real foundation."

"Oh, but it had, it had, del Monte!" the Prince replied emphatically. "The question is quite legitimate and the warning was based upon reality. The man who sent it to me in Venice was the representative of a Power on whose ears one can rely, and which has no reason not to be favourably disposed both to me personally and to my rule. And my question was as inevitable as the Age in which we live, and as my good will to live in this Age just as I am. It was for this reason and with a view to all possible contingencies — in the future

I mean — that I made such an emphatic display of my existence today. But this is only the beginning."

He asked for information concerning recent political events which del Monte briefly outlined. But he was careful not to mention the name of the Princess, possibly from tact, possibly owing to his love for his master. The Grand Duke examined his hands.

"That repulsive fellow, Caminer, is as a matter of fact very efficient and full of zeal, it seems to me," he observed at last.

"The President of the *Buon Governo* is the most efficient and most indispensable member of the whole administration," the Minister agreed gravely, "but like all high explosives, he is dangerous."

The Prince looked at him, not at all clear regarding the meaning of the last sentence.

"I shall take an early opportunity of promoting him to the rank of Commendatore," he said with a smile. "I shall cajole his fiery person."

A little later, during the Court reception, the Grand Duke saw Maria Corleone. She came up to him on the arm of Prince George, who was wearing a fantastic red uniform. The Grand Duke left the dais on which he was standing and, advancing a step or two towards her, kissed her hand. This was not a tribute to a friend, but to her Royal presence, which on such occasions he courteously acknowledged. The Pretender received his cousinly kiss on the cheek, and the Court, which was familiar with this ritual, no longer showed any surprise. Nevertheless, it was for this reason that the Grand Duchess made a habit of absenting herself from Court receptions. The sovereign looked at Maria Corleone with obvious joy and smiled and said a few kind words.

It was only two days later that they met in the little villa close to San Miniato, which officially belonged to one of the Grand Duke's chamberlains, but of whose purpose society was not unaware.

But even privacy did not alter the bearing of these two

people very much. Their greeting was not very different from what it had been under the eyes of the whole Court. He kissed her hands and looked at her. But he said nothing. He was thinking of the infinitesimal changes in her mouth, her smile and even her voice, which his acute senses had already observed at the reception. He held her hands fast. At last he expressed the joy he felt at seeing her again. Her eyes changed from gold to yellow and yellow to gold, which he knew to be a sign of anxious curiosity.

"Why did you come back by sea, *caro mio?*" she asked. And he saw her eyes fall beneath the shadow of their lashes, alluring and slightly challenging. His mind was possessed by the old grave thought that his love was the stronger, the more beautiful, the purer of the two; and in a trice he knew with what suffering love might yet be stifled. He smiled back at her.

"Why, Maria? Let us say it was an autocrat's whim."

And he gave a low laugh, for the Princess was looking at him in astonishment, her eyes staring wide in alarm.

THE BEGGAR'S HAND

I

The year continued eventful to the end, not a week passing without some great or small disturbance, some false or genuine alarm from beyond the frontier. At every fresh cause for general confusion and anxiety, the country asked: "What is to happen to us?" and "When will it happen to us?" But the terrible state of tension was relieved among the majority of the population by the indolent wish that, despite all signs and rumours to the contrary, nothing would happen. With mingled alarm and satisfaction, people watched the attitude of the authorities, who grew ever more resolute and unscrupulous as the uproar of the outside world drew nearer. And since, as a matter of fact, nothing did happen in the country, and, according to general belief, never would happen, the Government was greatly strengthened by the credit it acquired for having apparently without much pains succeeded in damming the revolutionary flood.

It is uncertain whether the Central Bureau of the Party in Paris was responsible for the insignificant isolated outbursts which occurred before the end of the year, when the failure of the Modena coup, and consequently of the whole of the insurrection in Central Italy, had become known. Even Guerra, who was still living undisturbed in Borgunto, did not inform the groups to what extent he was cognisant of these tactically mistaken risings, or whether he had even influenced them. Whether the miscarriage of the coup, which had died down like a burst bubble, possibly not altogether without help from him, had led to differences between him and the Central

Bureau, or had brought about a state of tension, he had informed neither his sister, who now lived with the Princess, nor Checca. Whether in the weeks that followed he had been actually engaged on work for the Party, such as his sister was performing in her own sphere, or whether he was entirely absorbed in his idyll with Maria Pia of the long plaits, even Checca did not know. And Checca only very occasionally dared to make the journey to Fiesole now. Possibly the only person who knew was Renzo Maddii, the printer, who was now a lackey in the service of the Princess, and acted as go-between for the leader and the two women. But Maddii was a man of few words.

On November 3rd the Pope died. His death was the signal for a number of fantastic and unsuccessful attacks on the Papal States, on the part of a few supporters of the Napoleonic régime, who had agreed to make Jerome Bonaparte's eleven-year-old son, of Westphalian memory, King of Rome and even of Italy. But the conspirators, who were chiefly Corsicans, were known to the Papal police and were arrested, before they had succeeded in taking San Angelo. The members of Napoleon's family, on the other hand, who were the leaders of the movement, were apparently well informed regarding the precautionary measures taken by the police, and were not among those arrested. They thereupon set to work on propaganda in the Adriatic provinces of the Papal States, but were soon forced to the conclusion that they could reckon on no support from the Italian Independence Party. In the same week in which Guerra warned the Central Bureau in most emphatic terms against accepting any of the Napoleonic family as members of the Party, even the sons of Eugene Beauharnais, Caminer, the Chief of Police, advised the Grand Duke to take the two leaders of the Bonapartist cause, the sons of the former King of Holland, who were approaching Tuscan territory, under his protection. They represented the least dangerous element of all, the Prince objected, since political fashion had decided in favour of the July monarchy of the House of Orleans. Paris was

more important, because it still continued to encourage the so-called Italian patriots. And the pedantic Lord of Modena was more important still, because he would not hesitate to accept a royal crown from a triumphant revolution, or to break an unsuccessful revolution on the wheel, and hang it on the gallows.

"There are still gallows in Modena," he said with a smile, nodding at the President. "How handy they would be for you as Provost Marshal if ever you should come to leave us! I should be very pleased to recommend you to my cousin of Modena, Cavaliere; but, as you have just heard, and indeed know, he is a moralist of a somewhat complicated kind."

Caminer bowed ceremoniously. He was accustomed to such jokes and did not find them at all bad. Moreover, while his sovereign was speaking, his attitude towards him had been quieter and more reserved than usual. He seemed to have learned all manner of things from his interviews with the Prime Minister, including certain tactics.

"Yes," continued the Prince, growing grave once more. "Louis Philippe is more important than Louis Bonaparte, the Duke of Modena is more important than Louis Philippe, and Signor Guerra is more important than my Lord Duke. Do you follow me? I mean from our point of view."

Caminer understood very well, and, as on previous occasions, when this infamous name had been mentioned, he could have revealed a whole list of discoveries and surmises of his own in connection with it. Indeed, he had actually mentioned these to del Monte, and, during the last few weeks, had even added various pieces of information to them, obtained through the remarkable efforts of that active Abate, who had really succeeded in gaining a firm footing in the Palazzo Corleone. Nevertheless, the Chief of Police had either come to attach greater value to silence, through his controversies with the Prime Minister, or he had perhaps actually learnt to be more tactful of late — for, stroking his beard, he said:

"In my opinion, your Imperial Highness, Guerra is not

only in this country, but he is also the leader of the whole of the Tuscan movement."

"Well, yes," said the Grand Duke, a little impatiently, "you are always telling me that, and I believe it myself. But that takes us no further. Nor do you seem to make much headway, Caminer, with his fellow conspirators whom you have arrested."

The Chief of Police shrugged his shoulders slowly.

"If I might be guided by my experience, your Imperial Highness, I should say that it is only possible to stifle a political movement, when one can see it or trace it." He paused and swallowed, as if he were embarrassed by his own logic. "I am, therefore, inclined to adopt the method of skilful provocation," he added, casting his eyes to the floor.

The Prince looked him full in the face, and the fair eyebrows rose and fell.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked. Caminer moistened his lips.

"I wish," he said with the shadow of a smile, "I could have had the opportunity of the Papal Police, when they suppressed the Bonapartist conspiracy. If I had been in their place, I should have waited another twenty-four hours. I should not have allowed a little struggle for San Angelo and the consequent courts martial to escape me. I would have . . ."

The Prince, who was listening most attentively, interrupted him.

"Apart from your desires and hypotheses regarding Rome, have you any precise proposals to make regarding Tuscany?"

Caminer cautiously denied the suggestion. The first thing to be done was to make sure of the aim of the policy to be adopted. Much depended upon preparing the ground. For instance, it would be a good plan to liberate political prisoners, who were useless to the authorities so long as they remained in custody, and to have them carefully watched.

"Do you mean Scaleterra himself?" the Grand Duke enquired. "I don't think that would be altogether wise."

Caminer thereupon explained that he did not of course mean any Party leader, but merely a certain alleged beggar who was probably an extremely well-informed instrument of the Party, was infernally gifted in passing himself off as semi-imbecile, but had nevertheless been used by the leader of the Party, within the very walls of the prison, to give information to the journalist — he referred to a cripple of the name of Gioia.

"Very well," said the Prince, "and what then?"

The President raised his hands as if to indicate that the answer to such a far-reaching question could not be hazarded yet. But in his tortuous way he gave what was a sort of semi-reply to the question.

"Much, of course, depends on where he goes." He paused for a moment, and then with bewildering and confusing suddenness, like a searchlight wantonly flashed round, he turned the conversation on to an utterly different subject. "And then, your Imperial Highness, much depends . . . or rather, what I should like would be a little genuine disturbance to the immediate north, in Bologna, Modena and Parma, to encourage our revolutionaries, and possibly set them an example."

The Grand Duke suppressed a cutting remark, passed a hand across his furrowed brow, as if to calm himself, and with his other hand made a gesture inviting Caminer to speak. The latter raised his chin with its cone of red beard. "And as regards the illustrious person of the Duke of Modena," he began in his softest Venetian accents . . .

"Aha!" cried the Prince, interrupting him, "it is certainly not a case of extremes meeting! But go on! I anticipate a most private confidence, Cavaliere!"

Caminer smiled humbly, as if he had been paid a compliment.

"Your Imperial Highness is very kind," he said in an undertone. "As regards the Duke of Modena, therefore, my personal view is that his equivocal political attitude has a deep

anti-revolutionary significance. His Highness is perhaps already putting into practice the very methods I have taken the liberty of proposing to your Imperial Highness. He is provoking in order to strike. Whether in so doing he is perhaps forgetting to preserve the necessary diplomatic forms, or the forms in keeping with his rank, is another matter which does not concern us. But another proposal which I would beg your Imperial Highness to consider, is this: we might, through an intermediary, whom I have at hand, and for whose discretion I am prepared to answer, send contributions of money to the Independence Movement, and, as far as I am concerned, even provide them with worthless arms into the bargain . . ."

"Stop!" interrupted the Prince, "you are going too fast for me. Your methods of instruction are too rapid, Caminer. I am not devoid of brains, but, after all, I have not had your previous experience in this kind of business. Perhaps also a certain moral bias is essential for such things. Are you at all ambitious, Cavaliere?"

This unexpected question caused the Chief of Police considerable embarrassment.

2

Despite his deep regard for the Princess, Prince G. Y. much preferred the months she spent at Isola to the winter season during which her presence immediately destroyed his headship of the house in Florence, and degraded him to something even less important than one of the numerous guests. Even if the Prince no longer had any aspirations in this direction, a certain weakness for the comfortable gratification of his tastes, and perhaps too a tendency to lack of scruple, such as ageing people are prone to show, was possibly natural. That is to say, it was among the most enjoyable incidental pleasures of his summer solitude to use the stately palace on the Trinità Bridge as if it were actually his own, to give his Club friends and the leading fashionable courtesans of the moment little

suppers, and with the silver service, or the Princess' gold dinner set for twenty-four people, which was famous all over the town, to make a parade of his royal state, and thus renew his credit for the winter, and with the connivance of the obliging *major domo,* have the whole cost entered on the monthly account for the upkeep of the royal household. All this, together with the many peaceful evenings devoted to gambling, the unrestricted use of the Princess' stables — in fact, life on a grand scale, which at other times he merely pretended to with a certain virtuosity and secret melancholy, entirely ceased the moment the lady of the house returned to town. In this strange year, it is true, this occurred later than usual, but, on the other hand, it happened so suddenly and so surprisingly, that it was only thanks to Baron Steiner's interference that no traces of undesirable guests were left to catch the sharp eye of the Princess.

In other respects, moreover, everything did not seem to be in order. Maria hovered between greater extremes of apparent uneasiness, irritability and lethargy than could be accounted for by the reasons of which he was aware — at least they were not due to his own person, which, although it never gave her any pleasure by its presence, after all left her quite indifferent. It is true there were political events and rumours — things which, though they did not interest him, were not exactly pleasant. But this indifference to politics changed to the wildest and most fantastic hopes for his dynasty when a communication from the Bonapartists reached his writing-table, to the effect that, should the situation in France and Italy prove favourable to their cause, they would place on the programme of their foreign policy an undertaking to support and resuscitate the Prince's claims to a throne, subject to certain economic and colonial concessions which would be submitted to him for his approval. While the Princess was spending her time with a Neapolitan girl, who had never appeared on the scene before, and seemed to be meeting the sovereign much more seldom than formerly, though she no longer even so much

as took her supper in her husband's company, George sat with the Baronissimo, as often as he could get hold of him, either in his rooms or at the fashionable casino, urging him to accept the portfolio for Foreign Affairs in his Government. Steiner accepted it, but insisted on caution and secrecy, and gravely and calmly added his comments and advice on any piece of bad news that happened to come to hand concerning the fortunes of the Bonapartist cause. When Steiner brought him the paper containing the news that Louis Bonaparte's eldest son had died of measles in Forli, where he had been shut up by the insurgents, the Prince, who was already somewhat fuddled with absinthe and the lateness of the hour, wept inconsolably.

The Neapolitan guest, Maddalena Labia, who had arrived unexpectedly in the early weeks of November, and who, like the Princess before her marriage, was a Contessina Labia, was the Prince's second preoccupation. The girl was too beautiful to leave him unmoved, but this was nothing extraordinary or even disturbing, for he had learnt to respect his wife's immediate circle, and, moreover, there were reasons why he had been less interested in women of late. Nevertheless, he could not deny that he felt a certain uneasiness when he beheld her, possibly because her face seemed somehow familiar, and because he always felt he had a guilty conscience; and perhaps too because the relationship between the two women seemed to him strange, being closer, more intimate and more secret — full of confidential looks and whispers — than that of cousins who have not seen each other for years usually is.

"I don't know," he confessed to the Baronissimo, "whether I am as stupid as the Princess would like to make me out but, beautiful as the girl is, I do not believe in their relationship."

"Why not?" Steiner enquired, examining his hands. The Prince stroked his bald head, which looked like a ball of dull ivory.

"As a class," George explained haughtily, "we have always

a sound instinct for legitimacy. Perhaps even you, Steiner, would be able to grasp this."

The old man smiled a subtle smile.

"Perhaps, Sire," he said, "but then be content with the instinct. The lady may be the *faux pas* of some Count or Countess Labia, although I should be only too glad to think that every queen had a face like hers."

"Good!" cried the Prince, raising a thin finger, "but I tell you I have seen that face before, somewhere, though it was not behind the scenes or in the boxes, nor was it in the intimacy of the family circle. It strikes me the Princess has many acquaintances whom I neither know nor wish to know. There is an extremely mysterious side to her life, very distressing—or is that not so?"

Steiner smiled again, but his eyes were serious and searching.

"These remarks of yours, Sire, are, I presume, more or less independent of your instinct for legitimacy! In any case I venture to regard them as unworthy of a king. The Princess does not deserve a vote of lack of confidence. And even if she did, you would not be the person to pass it. You lie under many obligations to yourself, Sire."

In the Prince's face, from which a life of emptiness had worn away all flesh and blood, the eyes were the saddest feature. They were somewhat prominent, dim and perennially watery, with extraordinarily long lashes like a woman. Without the change in expression being too obvious, they could be either haughty, as if they preferred to contemplate infinite space rather than deign to look on any man, or they could be full of the moist and clinging humility of the dog, clouded with fear at the thought of being left alone. Only old Steiner knew both these expressions.

He also knew that there was fear in Maria Corleone's eyes. He saw this precisely at this juncture, and understood perfectly well why the Princess, for the first time in the history of their friendship, was avoiding his company. For the old man, who occupied a strange position between the destinies of

his friends, though he had no power over those destinies, it seemed like outlawry and malicious irony that people should be afraid of him. For even the dubious Neapolitan visitor, with the well-dyed hair, was obviously not happy in his presence. He often called to mind the anxious night he had spent before the Princess had summoned him to Isola to ask him to save the Duke, when he had stood at his window watching the flashing lights of the spies, the carriage rattling behind them, and, without the exercise of much magic, had foreseen the fate of that shadowy procession, without, however, being able to alter it. And now in his wise way, resigning himself to inaction, and avoiding obstructiveness of any sort — for, far from wishing to barricade his path he only aimed at securing some sort of safety for himself at the right time — he nursed and fondled the simile like a piece of porcelain. He had unostentatiously withdrawn to his Museum near San Lorenzo, and, moved by a sudden impulse to counteract the tension in his being, had accepted a thousand pounds from a Welsh coal magnate for a spurious Andrea del Sarto, spending the money in endowing three gifted painters, and in adding to his famous collection of late Roman coins. He deposited this by no means inconsiderable sum in the Bank of England. There was a certain hastiness about his transactions; but this restless activity in business was merely the expression of his inner lack of serenity. His external life was unruffled, though perhaps not quite so obviously as before. He no longer appeared at the Palazzo Corleone every day at lunch time, but only once or twice a week at the official dinners. He still kissed the Princess' hand ceremoniously, as with a sad smile she gazed at his old head with its youthful black wig. She also scrutinised him during meals, when she thought she was unobserved, although he was watching her out of the corner of his eye. And then, especially towards the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, her expression of fear so closely resembled that of the Prince, her husband, that Steiner lay awake all night thinking about it, and indifferent to the charms of

his treasures, pondered over the state of her soul, and all the political possibilities that might account for her trouble; and yet, when day dawned, he had discovered no way of releasing her from the bewildering maze in which she was entangled. He knew that it was no longer possible for him to warn her, as he had done a few weeks previously, as a compulsory custodian, so to speak, of her secret, almost as her conscience. And she had indeed done what had to be done. But now she seemed the embodiment of misery, a creature hovering between two abysses. Poor woman! he often thought, what good is it to her that I, a useless old man, should be beside her in my thoughts; the others who are thinking about her, after all, belong to the Party.

Things were not going well with Maria Corleone. When Guerra informed her that his sister would have to live with her and carry on her work at her town house, which would be a sort of substitute for the necessary part Isola had played as a centre of action, and that she would have to exercise all her influence in order to ward off suspicion from Madda's person, and protect her from danger, she soon lost the good cheer and freedom of soul which she had been able to recover on the Duke's safe and in the end unsuspecting return. The moment in which Guerra had given her a glimpse into his heart, and had allowed her, in the most astonishing manner, to have a hand in guiding his complicated political machinery — nay, more, the moment in which, for the first time, she had seen in Guerra the politician also Guerra the man she loved, was now almost forgotten, or at least obliterated by fear. And her fears arose as soon as Madda, with lovely red hair and a wonderful southern accent, yet full of secret hostility, had crossed the threshold of her house on the Lungarno. It was the fear of a courageous creature for the invisible and the intangible. The fact that the subterranean politics, with which she had become involved almost for fun, should now be tracking her like a cunning sapper, and might at any moment blow up the ground beneath her feet, was a terrible thought.

And now there was the demoniacal presence of this girl. Guerra, as a man, regarded in the light of his mission, was enigmatical, difficult and unaccountable; nevertheless, he was the man who had once been tangible to her passion and who still played too conspicuous a part in her love. But Guerra in the shape of his sister Madda, as the expression of his will, was something vague and uncanny, and at bottom something unnatural and hostile.

Madda was in no way less friendly than she had been to the last at Isola. The terrible experience she had gone through seemed to have glided from her face and gestures. With the exception of Checca, Maria Corleone alone suspected what might have happened, even though she had not as yet succeeded in approaching the girl's real personality as closely as her old confidante had done. What was taking place on the political stage was even more tragic and enthralling than the spurning of a woman's love. And, moreover, Madda, whether acting on Guerra's instructions or on her own initiative, had adopted the devastating tactics of playing the part of the Neapolitan cousin, to a certain extent even towards the Princess herself. That is to say, she veiled her real object in an almost wounding fashion.

"I am really no longer quite sure myself, Madda," she remarked, quickly forcing herself to smile, "whether we are not as a matter of fact cousins."

The girl gave her a strange look which made her blush.

"I believe, Maria," she said softly, "that we are in truth very closely related."

These words, as it were, veiling a dark background, and possibly also the cumulative effect of the many grave and disconcerting incidents of that day, made Maria Corleone so absent-minded and engrossed in her own thoughts that evening, when she met the Grand Duke, that he was in the end compelled to ask her a question. But he found it by no means easy. Much as his nature needed clarity, he nevertheless dreaded it now, since it concerned this woman whom he loved,

and because he felt he could not enter into the changes that had taken place in her, or even into the cause of her obvious spiritual distress. But on that evening as, depressed, with eyes averted, she sat looking a little old in the great armchair, with quivering lashes and a pitiful smile, which hurt him, trying to remember that she was not alone, his pity at last overcame his caution. But caution made his compassionate question sound quite simple and kind. He did not stir in the high, stiff armchair in which he was sitting — as if he feared lest he might frighten something away — nor did he look at her. He merely asked:

"Maria?"

She did not look up either, nor did she give him that mechanical smile, which frightened him, and which he was expecting. She remained seated in the same position, slightly bent forward, with her hands folded on her lap. As she did not answer, the Prince ventured to look at her, and beheld a profile which was as hard as marble, and eyes wide open, with tears trembling on the lashes. It was rare indeed for this woman to cry, and she had never yet done so in his presence. And it struck him, with a sudden pang, how sparing she was towards him, even in her tears. "Surely it should be possible," he thought, somewhat puzzled by what he saw, "surely it should be possible to cry before somebody one loves!"

Then he said softly:

"I suppose I cannot help you, *cara mia?*"

She looked up quickly, at first almost frightened, but soon comforted by his kind eyes. And reaching out for his hand she held it tightly.

"Do you want to ask me anything, *amico?*" she enquired.

"No," he replied gravely.

They were silent for a while. Maria, in that moment, had the curious feeling that she loved the Prince. But she could not tell him so, despite the fact that she felt that precisely now it would make him happy. For she saw how agitated he was, and how his agitation seemed to increase.

"Well, yes," he said all of a sudden, "I must ask you something. I owe it to you to do so. Maria, would it relieve you — if I were to give you back your freedom?"

"Oh no! Oh no!" she cried hastily and almost in horror, without stopping to think. He stroked her hands.

3

Don Lionello Vacca was well acquainted with the Princess' mode of life, at least with that part of it which was spent outside her home. He used to take up his stand either on the lofty arches of the Trinità Bridge, or in front of a bookseller's shop window close by the Lungarno, whenever she went out. He could generally tell her destination from the direction taken by the carriage and, calculating the length of the journey, managed to turn up at the right moment either in the Cascine or the Café Doney, just as the Princess ordered some refreshment and allowed her hand to be kissed by one or two gentlemen who stepped up to her carriage. But although it was difficult to overlook him, and despite the fact that he never failed to give her a humble greeting if the opportunity arose, the Princess never so much as vouchsafed him a glance. But the Abate was not sensitive, and was, moreover, able to veil his personal disappointment beneath his official duties.

Long before Madda Guerra first appeared beside her in the carriage, and indeed no later than the day when, in a very dusty travelling coach, she had driven through the Porta Romana and stopped before the Palazzo Corleone, Don Lionello reported the presence of a guest to the Chief of Police, though the driver of the conveyance had not been able to give him any information as to where she had come from, declaring that he had only picked her up at Siena. And as, for some unknown reason, Madda did not at first appear in public, it turned out, strangely enough, that nobody waited to see her, except precisely the Abate Vacca, or rather, the authorities who were now a prey to curiosity.

But before the reply from the Neapolitan Chief of Police reached the Bargello, to the effect that the only unmarried woman of the name of Labia, except for a child belonging to a collateral branch, had years ago taken the veil, and was living in an Ursuline Convent in southern Italy, the Princess' guest startled the Abate by provoking his interest in the most unexpected and bewildering manner. When it first occurred to him that the girl was acknowledging the greeting he had intended for the Princess, he explained the circumstance by supposing that it had been merely one of those illusions of which he was constantly the victim in his dealings with beautiful women. Nevertheless, resolving to make quite sure, he placed himself on the following day immediately in front of the entrance to the Café Doney, as the carriage bearing the two ladies drove past. He bowed low, and both the girl and the Princess acknowledged his greeting. He was dumbfounded, and, as he was accustomed to subject his vanity to his shrewd reason, he proceeded, while two gallants were swinging their canes and paying empty compliments to the Princess, who was very grave, to examine not the figure but the face of the girl beside her. Don Lionello enjoyed looking at a well-built woman far too much to trouble his mind about the part played by cosmetics. He did not notice, therefore, as the Baronissimo had done at the first glance, the art with which her hair, her brows and her skin had been treated, to produce those slightly masked features which, beneath the bold curves of her bright hat, were as well lighted as a beautiful picture. Nor did he even notice it later, when he was able to examine her face more closely. But, for the moment, what he saw gave him food for thought, and the upshot of his meditations was not so very far-fetched, seeing that for weeks in his conversations with Caminer, Maria Corleone's name had been coupled with that of Guerra. It is even possible that his belief that the girl might be Guerra's notorious sister, had already begun to form vaguely on the very day of her arrival, and that the resemblance of her eyes and firm mouth to the eyes and mouth of her brother,

whom he had seen more than once in the latter's Florentine office, now, for the first time, flitted through his mind. And yet what puzzled the observant priest was the irony or provocativeness about that mouth and those eyes, as they now looked at him.

The two gentlemen bowed and left, and the Princess handed back the tray with the two port-wine glasses to the lackey, who passed it on, together with a gratuity, to the waiter. The girl made a sign to the Abate with her eyes — possibly this too was only imagination, or even a mistake; for the next moment she was speaking to the Princess, though certainly with the somewhat fixed smile of one who knows she is being observed. Don Lionello made up his mind. Whatever the truth of the matter might be, he must not let the opportunity slip of once again getting into touch with the Princess — for it was most important for the business in hand. Five long strides brought him to the side of the carriage, and he raised his hat.

"Stop!" the girl immediately cried to the coachman. The Princess, raising her eyebrows, gave the priest a cold nod. Vacca's great round face had little swellings about the cheeks and under the eyes, probably the outcome of his extreme piety.

"Excellenza, you may perhaps remember," he said in his soft oily voice, "that I had the honour of calling upon your Highness a little while ago at Isola, on a charitable mission, and obtained fresh proof of your Highness's well-known benevolence . . ."

"Yes, I know, I know," interrupted the Princess, looking across and away from him. Vacca glanced with some embarrassment at her companion, who did not take her eyes off him, but laughed softly and provocatively at him.

"I think, *Reverendo,*" she said in a marked southern accent, "that you and I have met before."

For the moment Lionello was speechless, and also somewhat bewildered by her laugh, which had a sort of fragrance.

"Yes, Signorina," he replied, pulling himself together. "I too almost fancy that we have met. But where?"

He felt the blood rushing to his face under her stare. But now her lips looked thin and vicious.

"Did you not celebrate Mass once or twice this spring in Naples, at the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine near the Porta Nolana?"

"You must be making a mistake," Vacca murmured, taken aback. "For I have never been in Naples."

"Oh!" she cried and shut her eyes. "Then I must be mistaken."

As, at this moment, the Princess raised her hand, probably to sign to the coachman to drive on, the Abate had no time to bring order into the confused impressions he had received. And he was forced to have recourse to a somewhat forced expedient not to miss the goal which was now so near.

"Just one moment, if you would be so kind, *Excellenza,*" he said, turning to the Princess, who did not look at him. "If the Signorina Principessa has not yet heard of the proposed restoration of the old church of Santo Jacopo Soprarno . . ."

"No," interrupted Maria Corleone, looking nervous, "but if you wish to speak to me about this or any other matter, just let my *major domo* know. I would then receive you, and you would have a better opportunity of explaining everything than you have here in the street. *Addio Reverendo — Avanti* Giuseppe!"

The carriage drove off, and turning round, made towards the Arno, to the Princess' palace close by. The Abate walked in the same direction, deep in thought. The girl's greeting, a moment ago, had been cool and courteous, like that of a stranger, though there was something in her face not altogether cool and strange. Was he mistaken, or was the girl really Guerra's gifted sister, about whom, in the political section of the *Buon Governo,* all manner of things were whispered by lascivious lips? For reasons which were not clear even to himself, he resolved for the time being not to say anything to the Chief of Police about what he had just seen and heard. He acted on the principle of keeping his amorous adventures

distinct from his political enterprises, or of only combining them unofficially, as it were, for his own private edification. As yet he was uncertain to which category the results of the day's experience would belong. As he crossed the triangular Piazza and saw the turrets of the Palazzo Corleone rising behind the Palazzo Ferroni, he thought, with a rare display of tact, that to pay a visit so soon would be both unseemly and foolish. Whereupon, still confused, he entered the Church of the Holy Trinity and prayed in the chapel of St. Bernard, his patron saint, who always helped him at difficult moments in his life.

To pay some attention to the Abate Vacca, and to take advantage of the first good opportunity in order to invite him, was, for the time being, the only wish that Madda expressed to the Princess. And the Princess agreed, because she could think of no reason for declining to perform this apparently harmless service. The fact that it was as little harmless as the person of the priest himself, and merely meant the beginning of further dangerous manœuvers on Guerra's part, she knew only too well. She was, however, at a loss to discover how she could possibly divert the avalanche from her house. But when, on the very next day, the Abate presented himself, and at the same moment, by some strange and mysterious coincidence, Baron Steiner, bearing a volume of verses by Alfred de Vigny, of sacred memory, unsuspectingly entered the reception room and beheld the priest, Don Lionello, and met in his eyes the dismay with which the old man was already familiar, Maria Corleone was obliged to seize her old friend's puny shoulders and whisper hastily:

"Yes, yes, dear Baron, I seem to have had a new friend thrust on my house . . ."

"*Poverina!*" he exclaimed, stroking her hand. "Is what you have just said an extempore effort, as it were, or was it consciously directed at me—as consciously as what you said a little while ago up at Isola? . . ."

Maria Corleone grew pale, and grasped his sleeve.

"I don't understand you at all, Steiner," she said in great agitation, and then she added softly: "Things are so bad with me, *amico*. . . ."

Steiner turned his tiny birdlike head to the window, and after a while asked:

"Shall I take you to Rome, Maria? You are neglecting your beautiful house on the fine Piazza di Spagna. And even that grotesque creature, Christina of Sweden, who, though she had never met me, bequeathed me two magnificent coins of the period of the Emperor Otho, and a manuscript of Cartesius, found that Rome was never more entertaining than when a conclave was sitting. If your Highness's political interests were not so circumscribed, and you could, with your smile, decide between the Cardinals of the 'Zelanti' and of the 'Diplomatici,' then you might at least procure yourself the vulgar amusement of selecting a Pope. That woman, Christina, was not only ugly, but she was also a born heretic — and yet she was able to do it."

The Princess gave a low laugh.

"Whatever are you talking about, my dear friend," she said. "Do you really imagine that you are making things any easier for me? And do you seriously suppose I could go away — or would wish to?"

The Baronissimo put his square monocle into his eye, and opened the book.

"If we plain men have to be quiet," he said, "then it is the poet's hour. And this one here, a melancholy optimist, has words of comfort for tortured souls."

"Read something!" the Princess begged.

Madda received the Abate, apologising for the Princess, and listened while the scheme for the restoration of Santo Jacopo Soprarno was explained to her. She displayed the semi-interested reserve of a great lady, who can just tolerate a short hour of dutiful benevolence. Don Vacca, who would have been better pleased to get a glimpse of her first engaging smile, and had pictured a *tête-à-tête* with her on somewhat different lines,

endeavoured to be matter-of-fact and to look at her as seldom as possible. She replied that she would advise the Princess Corleone to make a contribution to the good work, that she herself would give a few gold coins, and that he was to call again in a day or two. He stood up murmuring formal thanks. Then suddenly she smiled and got up on tiptoe in order to draw closer to his flushed face.

"You are anxious to come, aren't you, Don Lionello?" she asked, allowing him to press her hand.

And she showed no surprise when he made his appearance again no later than the following day, and asked, not for the Princess, but for her. She went to greet him, though she was not yet dressed, and with a smile that lurked both in her eyes and her voice, she drove him mad. She gave him money. He held her hands in his, and with his heavy fingers, stroked her naked arm. Hardly perturbed, and with a scornful smile on her lips, she pressed a hand against his chest as he bent towards her and suddenly asked:

"Are you corruptible, Vacca?"

"Possibly," he replied, pulling a face. And she allowed him to kiss her.

"Do you happen to know why I asked you that?" she asked with a frivolous laugh.

"No," he said brutally, just over her lips. Again she laughed almost inaudibly, with her parted lips almost against his face. Overcome with emotion, he drew his head back. Then she whispered almost merrily:

"Because the Princess declares that you are a spy, an *agent provocateur* and the right hand of the Chief of Police, and Heaven only knows what else!"

Vacca calmed down and released her.

"That is absolutely untrue!" he protested. And she laughed more heartily than ever.

"Of course you would have to say so, *Reverendo!* After all you could not admit it! But that doesn't mean that you must run away and leave me — we can surely make our own little

terms — every woman does, who is not exactly madly in love. And, as a matter of fact, I am not as much in love with you as you are with me."

She followed him and slapped him hard on his fat cheek. He flushed deeply, almost as though he were angry, and his little eyes nearly disappeared in his bloated face. But he did not stir.

"Very well," said Madda, raising her eyebrows, "then this is the last time we shall meet."

"Nonsense!" he said rudely, and caught hold of her, "but what is the good of terms and promises to us? For neither of us is to be trusted!"

"Of course not!" she said with a laugh. "Well, then, you refuse to leave the Princess alone?"

She grazed his mouth with her lips and then released herself from his bewildered grasp.

"It is Caminer who refuses to leave her alone," he murmured, groping towards her. She was standing some distance away from him, behind a broad, heavy oak table.

"Who is Caminer?" she asked in matter-of-fact tones.

"The President of the *Buon Governo*. But you are making a dreadful fool of me, Contessina!"

She paid no heed to his last words, and as he leant across the table, she motioned him back with a stern glance.

"Now be reasonable, Vacca," she said. "Let us talk business! Why won't the President leave her alone?"

The Abate turned away, pulled his cassock straight and looked for his hat.

"You know that as well as I do, Signorina," he replied, "or you know it even better."

She let him go to the door.

"*Reverendo!*" she cried gravely, "if you don't answer me — you need not do so today — I shall ask the President himself. And now you know all about my way of asking, don't you? And you surely think me capable of succeeding in that quarter?"

Vacca looked at her, and shook his head.

"Caminer," he said thoughtfully, "is a harder nut to crack than I am. He is a fanatic, urged on by a demoniacal power, a sort of polar antithesis to — to Guerra." And he watched her, but not a muscle of her face moved. "But I have seen you before, Signorina," he added almost in a whisper. She made a grimace.

"And yet you say you have never been to Naples," she replied with a smile. "But now I am curious to know when you will come back."

Don Lionello muttered a greeting and left. Then entering the Church of the Holy Trinity close by, he prayed in the chapel of St. Bernard, as was his wont when he was bewildered.

4

The cold rainy north-east wind, which the people of Fiesole called the Vallombrosa wind, was whistling round the unprotected houses on the heights. Maria Pia carefully stopped up all the crevices in the windows, kept the heavy wooden shutters closed even during the daytime, and put olive wood and pine cones in the little corner stove of the study, which burned with a lively blaze of little flames. It was smoky in the rooms, but warm. Everything would have been all right, quite as happy as in the early days, after the Signorina's departure, if the Signore had not become so taciturn, always sitting at his writing-table, with that angry wrinkle in his brow. And his eyes no longer sought her, although she often made work for herself in the little study, and brightened the dark corners of the rooms with some little song — she had even pleased him a short while back with the beautiful words of one of them — and although once, she quickly and a little nervously (as was usual whenever she touched him or he touched her) passed a hand over his hair. But all he had done was to shake his head. He had hardly smiled!

He had been in this mood since the previous day, only

since the previous day, when he had returned from a two days' absence in the hills. He must have brought bad news back with him, or met with some disappointment or vexation. But the suddenness of this surly mood seemed to exclude the possibility that it might be due, either to some fault of her own, or to the fact that he was bored with seeing only her about him, and with being ministered to only by her shy love. For was he not both openly and covertly kind to her, although he was encircled and bounded by this new trouble? What could possibly engross him so much, she wondered, that her whole life should not occupy a tiny corner in his thoughts; for she could not imagine any thought of her own that did not centre in him, and one of his socks was more important to her than her whole person. Must such things really be — or was he perhaps an ungrateful creature?

"Leave us alone for a bit, Maria Pia," he said, as Renzo Maddii, the printer, entered.

"Oh, all right," she replied, and left the room. She did not like Renzo, although he had the finest voice in the town. But he did not sing very often, and was a gloomy, taciturn creature, "not quite right," according to the opinion of the community, and apparently in love with the Signorina. Maria Pia would not admit to herself that this attachment was in itself a sufficient reason for her dislike of him. She explained it all differently to herself, to the effect that whoever loved the sister could not love the brother, and that she did not like the confidence the Signore obviously reposed in Renzo. The air was full of sadness, everything was sad. The girl glided across the wet boards of the veranda, and through the fine steady rain, for a little chat with the women in the front of the house. Their hands were already swollen from being held over the glowing wood embers of their *scaldini*.

Renzo Maddii brought a message from Madda, begging her brother to exercise the utmost patience and caution. The obstacles were great, including the passive resistance of the Princess, whose reserve had already increased to an alarming

degree. She had now lost all her cheerful eagerness, and had grown fretful. In fact, she could no longer be relied upon, or at all events, not for very much longer. Caution ought also to be observed in regard to old Steiner, who certainly knew more than he ought to know. It might be necessary to consider some means of proceeding against him.

"Nonsense!" Guerra exclaimed caustically, "my sister must learn to drop her thoughts of violence, to which she never used to give way. She must stick to her job, and supply the *Buon Governo,* through fat Lionello, with so many false scents that the right one will escape them. She is not expected to do any more. Besides, all this is much less important now than it was even a few days ago — oh yes!"

And jumping up impetuously he kicked a smoking ember back into the fire. Then turning round quickly, he looked at the printer, who with his chin thrust forward, had a discontented expression on his face. Going up to him Guerra seized a button of his overcoat.

"Reliable?" he said, repeating Renzo's words. "I wonder who could be reliable in the tension of this unreliable life? Are you really reliable, Renzo? And is my sister reliable, do you suppose? Am I, forsooth, reliable in heart and soul? I at least know up to a point what stands behind things. But you? To the devil with you people in love!"

Renzo's skin grew a shade greyer than it had been before, but he remained calm and merely said:

"I don't understand what you are saying, Signore. Nor do I imagine it concerns me. But why is our work today less important than it was yesterday?"

"Because today it strikes me as being more senseless," Guerra rejoined, "or more paltry, if you will."

He stepped back to the little table, which he used for writing, sat down and began to smoke. Renzo waited for a while, to see whether he would say anything; then he enquired:

"Have you nothing more to say to me, Signore?"

"I might say a good deal to you, Renzo," Guerra replied, with a desperate shrug of his shoulders, "but I must think it over — to be quite frank; for . . ." He hesitated, and bowed his head. Then in low tones, he said: "For if you ever have to choose between me and my sister, you would choose my sister — wouldn't you, Renzo?"

The printer pressed his heavy hands in anguish right and left against his breast and shook his head.

"One could almost believe, Signore," he muttered, "that you were no longer in your right mind!"

"That is the best reply!" said Guerra with a nod; "but yesterday, I was in Pratolino, and did not meet the courier from Bologna, whom I expected, but an official from the Central Bureau. Now it is a long journey from Paris to Pratolino, isn't it? And it has to be worth while, don't you think so too, Renzo?"

Maddii opened his eyes, but did not reply. Guerra continued caustically:

"But possibly in order to denounce G.G. a journey round the world would be worth while. I am not entirely lacking in common sense, Renzo, and I know that there are not many people who could have used recent events in order to denounce me. Does not that concern you either, my friend?"

Slowly Renzo raised his chin and said:

"No, Signore, I call God to witness that I have not denounced you, nor do I know who can have done so."

Guerra gave a short laugh.

"I certainly do not mean you, Maddii! And I readily believe that you know nothing — if you don't already feel it. I too know nothing. I only feel. I also admit the possibility that I may be mistaken, and that I only got a reprimand because the last coup was stopped somewhat arbitrarily by me. Very well!"

He blew out a violent puff of smoke and laying his pipe on the table, put his hands on the arms of his chair, as if he might spring to his feet at any moment.

"Very well," he repeated, "but listen! Let me tell you this. Let me tell you about the vote of lack of confidence that I have received, and of special orders, which will necessitate certain changes, in the first place for myself and ultimately for us all. I have also received sealed orders, which are not to be opened until a certain day; and I tell you that I suspect what they contain, and that my suspicions have already given me many an anxious hour. So I will now disappear for a while — I am not deserting, mark you! — possibly the reverse. . . . All right, then, Renzo, I tell you all this and command you at the same time to say nothing about it to my sister. Nevertheless, I am convinced that you will now disobey me for the first time — or owing to a silly kiss become liable to disobey me."

Renzo stepped back to the door.

"That is going just a little bit too far, Signore," he said softly. Guerra rose and held out a hand to him.

"I beg your pardon!" he said. "I am unfortunately the kind of man who blames everybody else first, and only very rarely blames himself in the end." He paused a moment. For the next few days, he observed in conclusion, Checca could keep in communication with them.

Renzo left the house. Night fell almost invisibly behind the closed shutters, particularly as the lights had been burning for hours. Guerra wanted a breath of air. The pungent smoke of the wood fire was making his eyes and throat smart. He went to his bedroom, and opened the little door leading on to the balcony which joined the two houses together. It had stopped raining. The hills looked black and close in the grey air. In the west a rusty brown streak stretched across the twilight sky. It was an inhospitable night. It drove mankind indoors with their thoughts. Guerra groaned. Behind him he heard Maria Pia busy in the kitchen singing to herself. He called her, by singing her name to her own simple melody. It lent itself well to being sung. He heard her laugh fade away in the passage as she came along. In a moment she was at his side.

"You'll catch cold, Sor Carlo," she said, delighted at the

way he had summoned her. He clasped her puny shoulders and pressed her to him.

"Listen, *bambina,*" he said softly, and passed his lips over her hair. "This night is unfriendly to us. There are such things as good nights and bad nights, both to look at and to breathe. You will find that out some day, Maria Pia. I have found it out already."

"He is still sad," thought the girl, distressed, "he is even sadder than he was before."

"Try to imagine a man," he continued, "a poor man, who has to go out into this night alone, alone and stumbling over the ground in the blackness, panting up and down the dark hills, but who, nevertheless, cannot help preferring this unkind night before men and their ingratitude."

"Perhaps this is only the usual kind of fairy tale," she thought, "which he is so fond of telling." She trembled nevertheless when he led her in silence into the bedroom. Then sitting on the bed he took her on his lap.

"You see, my dear child," he said tenderly, "you have given away a love which is as beautiful as a miracle. And now you will cry and always be asking yourself what manner of man is that? But this man will not forget, Maria Pia. Some day he will come back and give you better thanks than he is giving you today."

She lay back in his arms, her eyes wide open, without saying a word, and looked at him, and as she looked, confirmed with her hands what she saw, passing them over his brow, his eyes and his lips . . . "If they let me live," he said in conclusion.

She nodded her head eagerly, clenched her fists and banged them together, as if to show that there was not the slightest doubt about his invulnerability. Then she kissed him.

"I love life as much as you do," he whispered.

Later on, as if roused from a bad dream, she asked suddenly:

"Is she your sister?"

"Yes," he replied in distressed tones. He thought she was going to ask more questions, but she stopped.

Early next morning, at about four o'clock, when the Mugnone valley was thick with mist, he set out. It was still dark, and he met no one as he hurriedly ascended the road to San Clemente. He was wearing the kaftan and beard of the commercial Jew.

5

Don Vacca was too shrewd immediately to make use of the reply he received from the Neapolitan Chief of Police, which to some extent confirmed his suspicions regarding the spurious Contessina. For the moment, he was not sufficiently clear in his mind to what extent his private desires might be allowed to prevail in this complicated case, and felt he had reason to fear his capacity for resistance in the event of adopting the purely professional line. It therefore seemed wise to be sparing of the truth in his dealings with this extremely intriguing young person, and to husband his reserves. Unfortunately there was that fellow Caminer, who frightened him, and whom he never flattered himself he could see through. His connection with this man and the authorities had an obvious and unforgettable cause — his poverty and his bad name with the Bishops, the two complementary adversities of his life. It was impossible for the former circumstance to change, whilst the second led to his being given only occasional, very occasional, badly paid temporary work. Nor could the cold shoulder of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, to which he had already been subjected, up to the Archbishop himself, be modified ever so slightly in his favour, for either his dire poverty or his bad reputation, or both, stood in the way. Thus he could not expect to be much enamoured of his new calling, and the modicum of pleasure he derived from the success which he ultimately achieved was not very great. Hence the thoughts that filled his mind throughout the week did not lie very far apart, nor,

from his somewhat eccentric standpoint, was the question which he ultimately asked himself immoral — why not accept Princess Corleone's good gold rather than the measly silver of the *Buon Governo,* or rather, why not accept both the gold here and the silver there, provided he could manage to keep them neatly and skilfully apart?

But there was that fellow Caminer, whom he feared, even though he treated him with the familiarity of a colleague, and who, with ruddy fervour, settled every question for himself. It were certainly better to have anyone, even the sovereign himself, as an opponent, rather than Caminer! He was inflexible, intangible, and, in certain circumstances, dangerous as a good fire. And Vacca was too fond of his own person to allow himself to be burnt. He would like to have been the only one to know the contents of the report from Naples. But the first he heard of it was necessarily from the lips of Caminer, and as it required only three questions from the latter to discover the object of Vacca's suspicion in the person of Princess Corleone's guest, the matter was to all intents and purposes settled against Vacca's private hopes.

Caminer raised his bushy red eyebrows, and folded his hands across his belly.

"All right then, your Reverence," he said, "we know that she is no Labia from Naples. But you don't seem to be convinced yet that she is Maddalena Guerra."

It was impossible for Don Lionello to return a plain "Yes" to this question, not so much because he was still in doubt as to the identity of the girl, but owing to a certain manliness and sense of chivalry which suddenly prevented him from allowing the woman he coveted to be torn from him with such contemptible speed, on account of his profession. His coarse body still harboured traces of the tender yearning soul of the young Seminary priest, which belonged to that brief period of his life when he had been pure, and though he never gave them a thought they unconsciously influenced his feelings. He was therefore evasive.

"No, Cavaliere," he said in the rough tones which he had unconsciously come to adopt towards the President, "I have not got as far as that. Meanwhile . . ."

"Good!" interrupted Caminer, "even assuming you were convinced of it, there would still remain the important question as to what reasons could have induced Guerra, at such a critical moment in his affairs, to send his sister to Princess Corleone, and possibly compromise all his fellow conspirators and bring worse things upon them."

Vacca looked at his Chief, who spoke in calm, friendly tones, his fat black cigar bobbing up and down in a leisurely fashion amid the red scrub round his lips, as he spoke. The Abate took his time to answer, for he was well aware that it was not so much that Caminer was anxious for information on a matter of which he was ignorant, as that he wanted to test an agent who was already suspect in his eyes. So, shrugging his shoulders and thrusting his great head forward, he said:

"Who knows? Perhaps on Guerra's side the decisive day is nearer than is generally supposed."

Caminer puffed a blue cloud of smoke from his lips and nodded thoughtfully.

"I think so too," he said. "The sister — always assuming she is his sister — might be his advanced guard, so to speak. And by all accounts she is an expert in the use of all kinds of weapons." He bit his lower lip and smiled and his expression was baffling in its malice. "So your present skirmishing tactics with her may not be altogether disagreeable to you — he he! I understand that you are not slow with the ladies!"

That was plain enough! The laughter that closed the remark was short and sharp. It was a warning well in keeping with Caminer's methods. Don Vacca contented himself with shrugging his shoulders and looking grieved. At the same time, he made up his mind to be a less frequent and more reserved visitor at the Palazzo Corleone.

Caminer was unaccountable and his ingenuity was full of mysterious tricks and extravagances. And when, shortly after-

wards, he informed the Abate that he was going to set the beggar Gioia free, Vacca did not, for the moment, know what to make of it, particularly as the Chief of Police was sparing in his comments. It was only later on, when Caminer explained the stages that had led to this step, and had told him to assist in the work, that he understood the move. And it confirmed him in the belief that any other combination of forces might be defeated, but never those of the Bargello.

Before Gioia was liberated he was placed in even stricter confinement. The old man, who in the first week had been taken from his vagrant's cell to a double cell, in which a spy, disguised as another prisoner, had been placed (even this had not succeeded in eliciting anything from him, although it had broken off his communications with Scaleterra), was now, without any apparent reason, placed in a dark dungeon down in the cellars, and put on short rations. As he had had some experience of the methods adopted against political prisoners, and knew that it was best to abide by his original attitude of obtuseness and dull-wittedness, he asked no questions. Extraordinarily patient and unassuming and, as it were, calming the pangs of hunger he occasionally felt with the sombre peace of his cell, he squatted on the plank bed, whose outline he could barely distinguish, and passed away the time between the hours chimed by the Bargello bell with thoughts which frequently ran, as those of old men do, on trifling incidents in his life — one of Salomone's roast joints, a smile from Checca, a peasant in the Mercato, cursing and swearing because he had let a large straw-covered bottle of wine fall out of his cart and be smashed to atoms. Sometimes his thoughts would flit back to days long since gone by and, like fat birds picking up grains of corn, bring back snatches of old tunes and melodies to his mind. And thus the days went by and he was scarcely more harassed or miserable than he had been in the Cortacce of the Ghetto.

But early one morning, at an hour when he generally tried to make up for the sleep he had not been able to get at night,

the entry of a priest into his cell made him go cold with fear. As Vacca held the candlestick with its uncanny flickering light rather high, his face at first remained in the shadow and could not be seen. Gioia was so terrified that he forgot to get up and only turned his puffy distorted face to the light. Owing to his infirmity and the constant pain he was in, he had a peculiar way of lying down, resting crouched over his crippled arm, and pressed close to the edge of the bed, as though he might at any moment roll sideways out on to the floor. But he found this kept his aching shoulder warm, and also, as it were, pressed the pain out of it.

The alarm in his face was so obvious and so out of keeping with his usual listlessness, and the whole scene was so reminiscent of the last hour of a man sentenced to death, that the Abate, who was at least a well-trained psychologist, felt it incumbent upon him to turn his dramatic entry, which so admirably fitted the past history of the cell, to account. So he muttered some snatches of Latin prayer, and in order not to alter the dim uncertain light in the cell, he placed the candlestick on the sill of the blind window a good way up the wall. Owing to his gigantic stature he hardly had to stretch a limb in order to perform this action. Whereupon the old man, who was now wide awake, recognised him by his height, and calmed down a little. He turned things over in his mind and began a low lamentation. Whenever he was being looked at or observed, he was in the habit of muttering and groaning to himself in an endless flow from which a *"Dio"* or a *"Madonna"* alone stood out, like a tree in a fog, and when he did happen to answer a question, he smothered it in lamentations as if to demonstrate his enfeebled powers of comprehension. Vacca was perfectly familiar with this whining litany, and knew from the way in which it had been turned on, that he had been recognised. He was accordingly obliged to modify his tactics somewhat, and taking the light down from the window-ledge he set it on the little table, which shook on its weak legs and rattled against the wall as he touched it — Gioia knew this

sound well, it was the loudest that ever disturbed the solitude of his cell, and was more like a scraping than a knocking — and cleared his throat, as if he were the bearer of an important message.

"Well, good morning, Gioia," he began, "and God be with you."

By way of reply the old man wailed a little louder than before, turned on his back, and then raised himself laboriously into a sitting position by resting on his begging hand. The Abate, who vouchsafed him never a glance, sat down on the stool, drew the light closer and, frowning sternly, fumbled about in his bosom. Groaning and blinking, Gioia watched him, then irritably throwing back his blankets, he let his horribly deformed legs, which his turned-up trousers left quite bare, glide from the plank bed. Don Vacca moistened his lips as if he were about to speak, slowly unfastened the top buttons of his overcoat, and taking from his breast pocket a paper which was obviously an official document, laid it on the table.

Gioia stopped his lamentations. He was not even conscious that his naked feet were touching the cold stone floor. With quivering chin he gazed at the document, which bore a seal and was stamped with a coat of arms. Don Lionello was aware of the effect he was producing and read the document through slowly and thoughtfully, moving his lips slightly and nodding his head. Then turning his face to one side, without actually looking at the old man, he said solemnly:

"Gioia, I have to speak to you again for the last time, and appeal to your conscience; and once more, it is in your own interest."

He laid stress on the finality and irrevocability of his words. Gioia rolled his eyes, as if he were racked with a fresh access of pain, and stretched out a hand quickly to a pocket in his coat, which hung above him on the wall, as though he were reaching out for some drug. But all he did was to take out his blue glasses, and place them awkwardly on his nose.

"What is this?" he murmured. "*Dio! Dio!* What is all this about?"

"Yes," said the Abate, suddenly raising his voice and striking the document with his hand, "it is practically proved that you are in close touch with the journalist, Scaleterra, a notorious rebel and demagogue. I am not, of course, at liberty to tell you, my friend, whether Scaleterra himself acknowledged as much . . ."

Fat Vacca lingered significantly on the last words, and cast an inquisitive glance at the old man. Gioia whined:

"*Madonna,* what is Monsignore talking about? . . . Have mercy! I understand nothing, I . . . nothing whatever! A poor sick, dying old man like me! . . . *Dio! Dio! Dio!*"

Don Lionello drummed his fat fingers relentlessly on the table to interrupt his lamentations.

"Friend Gioia," he cried, "we don't want your lamentations. We don't even want you to admit the facts. All we want to know is, where Gasto Guerra is."

The old man was silent for a moment. Then he was seized with a dry cough which almost choked him, and was forced to lie back on his plank bed. But every cough has its end. Don Lionello, quite unmoved, occupied himself with reading the document, and waited until the sounds from the bed died down. Then toying with the paper he said:

"Gioia, if you but knew what there is in this paper, you would answer me without further ado."

Gioia did not stir, but he breathed very loudly, as though he were laying in a store of breath in order to be able to speak.

"I really know nothing," he groaned. "I am in pain!"

The Abate stood up, and with the document in his hand, stepped up to the bed.

"Very well," he said. "Then listen."

Gioia raised his begging hand with a strangely deprecating gesture. Then, speaking quite softly, in his hoarse begging voice, which sounded strange, as though it came from a different spirit, he said:

"That cannot be! Your cloth would not permit it."

The Abate was overcome with deep shame, and dropped his arms.

"You have misunderstood, Gioia," he muttered, "this is the order for your release, if . . ."

The old man shook his head.

"I know nothing," he said. "And I don't care much anyway."

"What about?" Vacca enquired in surprise.

"Oh, about being set free."

Vacca gazed at him thunderstruck.

"My friend, I don't believe you," he replied. Gioia said nothing. "Are you frightened?" Vacca enquired suddenly. "Frightened of what lies outside?"

"Yes," replied Gioia in a tired voice. The Abate stepped back to the little table and said kindly:

"Here is a good offer. We shall guarantee that you will not be punished. You will be set free, given two hundred ducats, and a light job as porter or housekeeper, and we will assure you the protection of the State. Then you can relieve your conscience by telling us all you know."

Gioia's lips moved. He muttered incoherently, sat up, pushed his glasses up on his forehead, and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"What is the matter, old fellow?" Vacca asked kindly. Gioia burst into sobs and then coughed loudly, probably from embarrassment.

"It would be very nice," he said at last, "but it is impossible."

"Why?"

"There is no protection."

"Against what?"

"Against punishment."

"Against what punishment?"

The Abate leant attentively across the table. Gioia blinked at him with his watery eyes, with his mouth half open. Then he smiled almost insanely.

"Against the punishment of God!" he replied with a giggle.

"Poor devil!" said the Abate, and putting two gold pieces down on the table, he left the cell. At ten o'clock that morning, Gioia was set free.

The daylight was fierce and glaring, and slipped in maliciously behind his glasses, making his eyes smart. The noise of the busy streets struck rudely upon his ears which had grown accustomed to silence. Moreover he found it hard to walk at first. His legs had swelled in the damp cell, and owing to weeks of inaction had grown stiff and refused to carry his body properly. The world about him seemed to be spinning round, the street in front of him broke up into steep steps, and he felt as though he were up to his knees in thick mud. He fell forward, and suddenly saw the hard squares of the paved road bulging under his eyes, covered with horse dung. Two strong arms supported his shoulders. He cried out, prompted more by caution than by pain.

"Poor devil!" he heard someone say behind him, the same words of pity as he had heard only a little while ago from the lips of the Abate. He felt a longing for pity today. He allowed himself to be set on his feet again. He could still feel the strong grip on his left arm, and turned his head round slowly. His helper, who was a handsome young man, dressed in the overalls of a cooked meat shopman, was looking kindly at him.

"Are you ill, old fellow?" he asked. Gioia nodded and saw six, eight, ten and ever more and more people about him. They all looked commiseratingly at him and murmured words of pity. This pleased him, and made him feel quite warm.

"Are you also hungry, my good fellow?" his helper enquired. One or two women exclaimed that he must be hungry, that one had only to look at him to see that!

"Yes," replied Gioia, although it was not true.

"Come in here to my uncle's," said the handsome young man. The crowd applauded, and Gioia was pushed into a *Pizzicheria* close by, crammed with fat sausages and huge cheeses, the ceiling covered with hanging hams. The fatty

odours pervading the shop gave the old man a faint feeling of nausea, and enabled him to taste to the full the triumph of pity. "There are so many good people," he thought, still a little bit bewildered. The uncle, a man with a head like Caesar's, picked up a long thin knife, and with consummate skill, cut some slices of ham as transparent as wafers and some huge rounds of *Mortadella*. Then heaping the meat on a plate, together with a piece of bread, he handed it to the old man, with a large glass of Marsala. In front of the shop door, the crowd showed their approval at this act of charity. The uncle pretended not to hear them, but his eyes sparkled with joy. Gioia was already eating, and without undue effort, showing all the signs of hunger; for he was delighted by this wonderful display of good nature. Meanwhile, the handsome young man was busy whispering with his uncle and the people outside. Gioia soon heard the ring of money — copper, silver and a small gold piece which the uncle flung on to the counter. Then, with a quick, good-natured stroke of the knife, he cut a sausage from the wall. The crowd watched everything with loud expressions of approval. The handsome young man came out with the money and the sausage.

"Mamma mia!" Gioia muttered. "How good you are!"

Whereupon, shy and speechless with joy, he took his departure, nodding his head eagerly and somewhat absurdly as he went. The faces of the people outside looked chalky and unreal through his glasses and he cast sidelong glances at them from behind his spectacles in order to carry away with him some of their warm comforting looks. He felt he owed them this token of gratitude. But he could no longer catch that look of profound pity in their eyes. The crowd was too sharply divided into those who were glaring in the naked light, and those whom he saw behind the deep blue shadow of his glasses. Those who had taken little part in the scene were already turning their backs, though one woman asked him whether she could not see him safely home. But it was precisely the offer that should never have been made. In the confused

stubbornness of his comfortable sensations, Gioia did not want anyone to remind him of reality. Hastily, almost as though he were offended, he said " No! " and lurched forward.

But he still retained sufficient comforting warmth in his heart, his stomach and his head from the experience. And as he went along he muttered cheerfully to himself. The heavy wine and the crisp air, both unaccustomed luxuries, made him feel a little bit giddy. Any joy bestowed by his fellow men was such a rare occurrence that he had some difficulty in thinking about it. So there were joys on earth, even for him — nay more, very much more; there were actually people who were willing to give joy to Gioia! He stopped, swaying from side to side, and then stood still. Joy — Gioia! Ever since the days when his companions in Rome had joked about it, it had never once occurred to him what a beautiful name he had. It was so challengingly bold to be mated with joy! He laughed softly, not resignedly, but as if he were flattered. And all the pleasant confusion of that hour had arisen from the old and quite unexpectedly satisfied longing for consideration! Now his reeling thoughts were not so very far from the longing for love. He raised his begging hand, which he had been holding at the usual level, and sighed foolishly at the picture his mind had conjured up. Then there was Checca too, who was also called Joy. Checca! Checca! Checca! he muttered, signing with his hand. The thought was quite distinct. She too would be good to him now, as unspeakably good and friendly as the most secret kernel of joy sacredly concealed in his memory — as good and friendly as she could only be through the miracle of that same name, and what a name!

He looked up. He was standing in the Via Ghibellina, in front of the gateway of the Palazzo delle Colonna. The old porter, who was apparently a retired soldier, with two bright medals, which stood out conspicuously on his breast, was sitting on a stool by the gateway smoking a pipe, gazing vacantly at the tobacco smoke. A kitten was playing with his baggy trousers and apparently he did not notice it.

Gioia stopped and looked at him, and another thought flitted into his brain from another corner of his world. The words which, so to speak, belonged to it, he now repeated:

"That would be very nice!"

He uttered them aloud. The door-keeper looked up, saw him and removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Yes," he said, as if he knew what the remark referred to. Then he drew a leather pouch from his fawn-coloured great-coat. "Tobacco, friend?" he asked with military brevity. Gioia, with a humble salute, drew nearer.

"A thousand thanks, sergeant-major," he said, and helped himself, although he possessed no pipe. Then stuffing the tobacco into his pocket, he murmured, "Good day!" and continued on his way.

He pondered over the enchanting day. Everything had been good — why should not Checca be the best of all?

At the corner of the Via Ghibellina and the Via del Diluvio, which he had to pass on his right on his way to Santa Croce, two sinister forms were standing who, as he well knew, were secret agents. They did not even take the trouble to pose as careless loafers. They must have been watching the stages of his joyous progress, and were now waiting for him, gazing coldly at him, after the manner of policemen, to find out which way he was going. With friendly equanimity he lurched towards them, still under the spell of the last wonderful hour, and as if ready for a reconciliation. Or, with his head quite clear now, was he animated by the challenging desire to discover the good points even in these evilly disposed creatures? He therefore slackened his pace when he was almost in front of them, and muttering a few incoherent words of appeal, he stretched out his begging hand. The two men, one a tall, strong, unshaven fellow, and the other shorter and more neatly dressed, with a smooth chin above his high stock, looked at each other in some embarrassment. Then the shorter of the two gave a merry wink, put his hand in his waistcoat pocket, and dropped a copper into the hand that swayed slowly by.

"Good-bye, Father Gioia!" he said, and laughed good-naturedly. The unshaven fellow uttered a curse. Gioia murmured his thanks and lurched on.

It was a clear victory — not on his part, however, but on that of the human-kindness which seemed all-powerful that day. After going on about a hundred yards, he turned cautiously round. The agents were following slowly behind him. "What else could they do?" he thought, apologising for them to himself. "Are they not officials who have a duty to perform?"

In the crisp morning air the old man was now able to think things over clearly. The slight giddiness he had felt from the wine had quite disappeared, and the happiness that remained kept his thought steadily concentrated on the beautiful goal before him. He knew perfectly well what he had to do now. To meet the situation in which he found himself that day there were exceedingly important and precise instructions, which took into account the possibility of police supervision after his release, and forbad all communication with the Party or a return to his usual manner of life for some days. Gioia knew the hiding place he had been told to go to in such circumstances, and he seemed to be obeying instructions as if his secret goal lay in the same direction.

Following devious ways along the left bank of the Arno, he made for the San Spirito Dio quarter. The hours went by and he was very tired. There, in the working-class quarters on the outskirts of the town, close to the Porta San Frediano, in the blind alleys and lanes along the Via del Leone, and the Via del Campuccio, were the criminal haunts, which were visited by the police only in strong patrols. They were not hiding places and asylums for lonely outcasts, solitary individuals and desperados, such as the Ghetto provided, but the base and headquarters of well-organised bands of thieves and receivers of stolen property, consisting chiefly of ex-convicts who, by the by, rarely committed any capital crime. The houses were not like those in the Ghetto, a wild, straggling tangle of brickwork, soaring up to the clouds and grappling with each other

like raving cyclopes; but small wretched hovels of one or but rarely two storeys, doorless, windowless, crooked, filthy and extremely poor, kept up only by an unspeakably powerful will to evil. They were narrow huts consisting of one or two rooms on each floor, inhabited by two or four families with four, six or seven members to a family. A whole family would sleep on one mattress, and there was no filth, whether of body or soul, which they did not use as a covering. They were all under-sized, nimble, obscure creatures, with the devil in their hearts.

Gioia knew them. He did not despise them, but, on the other hand, he had not much respect for them. For at heart he was a moral man, who regarded their detestable struggle against society as low, intolerable and unclean. The only estimable point about them was their discipline, and also their readiness to join the revolutionary bodies.

The old man had been waiting a long time on the Ponte alla Carraia; for it was necessary not only to confuse his pursuers, but also to keep them on his tracks. He stood still, extended his begging hand, and watched the passers-by on the high-arched bridge. He received alms in plenty, which did not surprise him, for was it not a day of blessing? At last the two secret agents appeared. Apparently they had lost sight of him in the neighbourhood of Santa Maria Novella. Gioia stepped truculently forward and stretched out his hand.

"*Brigante!*" exclaimed the unshaven one, whose temper had become even worse meanwhile. But the neater of the two laughed once more, and again gave Gioia a *quattrino*.

"Father Gioia," he said, "you are not devoid of gifts!"

Gioia drew them behind him along the Via de Serragli, and then turned definitely into the infamous Via del Campuccio. It was swarming with people, squatting, lying or eating, half-naked, ragged and filthy, in the streets, full of strange curiosity regarding the figure that passed by. Even if they did not know him, the old beggar in any case did not appear suspect. He waited in a dark passage, which ran through a

crooked house, and ended in a *cul-de-sac*. When he saw the forms of the police spies, advancing with considerable hesitation at the top of the street, he said to a bare-footed woman, who was squatting near him stolidly suckling her baby:

"There are two men of the *Corda* over there, only two."

"*Corda,*" in their criminal jargon, meant police, and there were special code words and formulæ for alarm and defence, with which every one in these streets was familiar. The woman, stretching her hairy head forward, confirmed his statement with a glance, and in a voice that was surprisingly deep and hoarse, exclaimed:

"Well cooked! Twice over!"

Everybody now knew what was afoot. The cry was passed on along the narrow passage, up to the floors above, and a good way along the street. Some men who had money and valuables in their possession, and were not sure whether a police raid was imminent, climbed up to the roofs, to the most dangerous parts of which ladders always stood ready. Suddenly there appeared in the street a band of thirty men, who, with swaying shoulders and their right hands in their pockets, started slowly walking in the direction of the Via de Serragli. The two secret agents turned quickly round, for, apart from this, they knew enough for the time being.

So far so good! Gioia repaired to a beer-shop, whose proprietor had some sort of obscure connection with the Party, and who was by way of being their agent for the San Frediano quarter. He was known only by the curious nickname of Guillotine, and nobody could explain nor apparently did anybody want to know why he answered to this appellation; for the proprietor of the bar, despite his fifty years, of which, as he readily confessed, forty had been spent in penal servitude, was the strongest man in the neighbourhood, with fists whose weight was proverbial, and an angular chin of paralysing brutality. People suspected that it was his fist with the knife it grasped, that had conjured up the evil image inspiring his nickname. His position in the neighbourhood had for years

been strangely undisputed; for he was, as it were, the Chief of Staff of the band of thieves, without ever going into the firing line. Thus he was one of the few men in the Campuccio quarter whose description it was not necessary to renew at the Bargello and who could move unmolested about the other quarters of the town; and as a receiver of stolen property, a smuggler of spirits, and probably too by means of levying a kind of tax on the active thieves, he had attained to a position of relative prosperity.

As Gioia was tired, he sat down at the long table, at some distance from the other guests, and asked for bread, cheese and wine. Guillotine rolled up to him, and nodded familiarly. His terrible chin took up an enormous portion of his face, which towards the top seemed to be younger and vanished almost without a brow, in a wild tangle of grey hair.

"What is the matter?" he asked. The old man blinked up at him, tempted for a moment to try whether even he would not fall in with the magic spirit of that day. But he changed his mind; he was physically weary and contented himself with a shake of his head. Guillotine scratched his unshaven chin with his huge thumb. That rugged chin, which barely moved when he spoke, only allowed brief sentences to be uttered.

"Dead beat, eh? You'll stay the night here, of course?"

"No!" Gioia replied at once. The athlete looked surprised and rolled his square shoulders, as if he were uneasy.

With Gioia's reply the strange nature of his errand began to be apparent. He remained seated there until dark, as if absorbed in himself, in a kind of contented numbness, full of his one thought. Nobody disturbed him, for people had noticed that Guillotine had been kind to him, and, moreover, the beggar's importance was fairly well known. When the grey street outside had grown black, Gioia stood up, and looking somewhat expectantly at his host, laid two four-soldi pieces on the table. He was not disappointed.

"Keep them, old man!" cried Guillotine from the other end of the table. Gioia picked up the copper pieces again, thanked

his host, wished all present good night, was given a friendly acknowledgment, and left.

The day had remained kind throughout. But at this point the forbidden things began. Gioia knew it; he did not deceive himself; he knew that what he was about to do was contrary to his duty, and was a piece of disobedience, carelessness, and in a sense a crime against the Party. But there was something higher, more important and more rare than all this. He made no mistake. For how could he tell whether he would ever have such a day again?

He lurched up the dark Via del Campuccio, and entered the Via de Serragli, which was better lighted and more respectable. It must have been about seven o'clock at night, and the streets were sufficiently crowded to make him inconspicuous. But whether, in his state of eager expectation, he gave a thought to this, is open to question. The fact that he did not walk in the middle of the street, but kept close up to the houses, was due to an old habit of his, a practice adopted partly from caution and partly from shyness, and was done almost unconsciously.

Moreover, he had not far to go. The Via de Serragli and the Via Romana met at a sharp angle in front of the Porta Romana. It was in one of the passages which joined the two streets, shortly before they met, that Checca lived. The old man had never visited her, because he had been strictly forbidden to do so. But he knew where she lived. He even knew which was her window in the large and gloomy working-class house. For, rarely as he left the part of the town allotted to him, he had been here once or twice in the course of years; but he had come secretly, unbeknown to her, when he had yearned for her. And he had once seen her tending the flowers on her window-sill.

The front door was open, as it always was in the poorer quarters of Florence. Gioia slowly climbed a dark and rickety staircase, which, with surprising twists and turns, passed innumerable doors. Even of these doors the majority were not

closed. On all sides the hum of human life, and every expression of human emotion, laughter, song and curse, met his ears. Gioia was used to this. When he thought he had reached the right floor, he turned into an open passage. A few paces in front of him, in the glow of a light coming from one of the rooms, sat a child, a girl of about seven, on a tiny chair, apparently doing nothing, looking as though she were meditating. Urged by a sudden inspiration, Gioia took his blue spectacles off, and tried as quickly as possible to get out of the gloom into the light, so as not to frighten the child. He had the feeling that he must on no account make a bad impression on her. His heavy boots made enough noise as he walked; but the child did not turn round, possibly because, owing to the number of familiar figures that used the passage, she had lost all curiosity. "Perhaps she is deaf," thought Gioia, and began to smile so as not to appear unfriendly to her.

"Good evening, *bimba,*" he said, as kindly as he could. The child thanked him, and glanced up furtively. He felt slightly relieved. Looking through the doorway, he saw a bare room, in which a very old woman was sitting. Her attitude of stolid thoughtfulness was strangely reminiscent of the child. They also sat facing the same way. Without stirring, the old woman looked through the doorway with round, dim eyes, over the head of the child, in Gioia's direction. But he had the feeling that she did not see him. "Perhaps she is blind!" he thought. But at that instant she enquired:

"What do you want?"

For some unaccountable reason, Gioia preferred to deal with the child, and addressed his reply to her instead of to the old woman.

"Is Checca at home?"

"No," replied the old woman; the child, who did not seem to have heard his question, said nothing. Gioia became agitated. Was the whole of that day to be spoilt by a silly accident?

"May I be allowed to wait for her in your room?" he en-

quired, looking hard at the child, as if her permission were the more important.

"I don't think so," said the old woman relentlessly, "for Checca . . . Who are you, by the bye?"

"I am the . . . I am a . . ." stammered Gioia in confusion; and then he bent down to the child, who looked up at him, as if in expectation, without any sign of alarm in her large bright eyes.

"*Bimba mia,*" he whispered, with friendly mystery, "you see, my little one, I am her *babbo.*"

Without further ado the child stood up and seized his begging hand. The old woman did not stir, but remained as stiff as a waxen image. She seemed to have taken no part in the conversation and uttered no sound to prevent the two from setting off along the dark passage and disappearing from sight.

A little way along, the child stopped and opened a door. Gioia could smell Checca's scent. The child led him into the dark room.

"Shall I strike a light?" enquired Gioia, who always carried a few sulphur matches in the left-hand pocket of his coat. "Are there candles here or a lamp?"

"I don't know if we may," the child replied somewhat anxiously.

Gioia remained obediently in the dark. The child too did not seem to stir; or possibly she had already crept away in her silent slippers. The old man argued to himself that there could not possibly be any objection to his striking one of his sulphur matches, in order to find himself a chair, and, taking one from his pocket he bent down laboriously and was on the point of striking it on the sole of his boot, when it occurred to him that it would make a bad smell in the scented room, and gave up the idea. At last he thought he would chance a question in the darkness.

"I wonder whether there is anywhere I could sit down, *bambina?*"

The child was still there. Her little fingers groped down his

sleeve to his begging hand and guided it to the back of a chair. Gioia sat down and was quite content. He seemed in a way already to have reached his goal, and refused to fear any further disappointments. His hand discovered a table in front of him, and on it a coarse linen cloth, on which some fine embroidery could be felt. The degree of comfort this implied astonished him and filled him with joy. "She can't be so badly off," he said to himself, with great satisfaction, "the room must look quite pleasant." And as at this moment he felt he must speak to some one, he said:

"Do you love Checca, too, my child?"

He was vouchsafed no reply — perhaps because the child had gone after all. Some time elapsed. Gradually in the dim light that filtered into the room from outside, Gioia was able to get some idea of the shape of the comparatively large room, which seemed to contain a lot of furniture. He was glad and stroked the table-cloth. "What if she does not come?" he suddenly said to himself; but quickly banished the thought, which seemed like blasphemy. By a simple process of association, other thoughts entered his mind — he recalled another room Checca had once inhabited, the only one, except for the homes of her childhood in Rome, in which he had ever seen her — the room, whose four walls had harboured the great sin — the never to be forgotten room in Toulon. The mist of twenty-six years was lifted completely. He saw everything again; but in this dark and joyful hour, he was no longer conscious of horror and repulsion, and no longer felt the scourge of the great sin. He began to tremble at the darkness and wanted a light.

"Here she comes!" the voice of the child exclaimed suddenly. Gioia made a wild gesture in the darkness, as if he had been disturbed. Then an approaching light turned from grey to dull yellow and then to brightness. Gioia recognised her footstep. In order to warn her that he was there, and save her from being startled by the sudden sight of him, he called out loudly again and again:

"Yes, here she comes — yes, yes, here she comes!"

Checca came in, holding up a candlestick in her hand. Gioia saw that she was greatly agitated.

"In God's name!" she exclaimed in hoarse tones, and immediately closed the door behind her. The child had vanished. Gioia tried to give his daughter a reassuring look, but he only succeeded in producing a shadow of a smile, which looked rather foolish. Checca set the candlestick on the table.

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" she demanded. The tone was rude, but the laboured, wheezy breathing that accompanied the words, and was still audible, softened its harshness. He shook his head and looked at her unmoved.

"Checca, Checca!" he said softly, "Look . . ."

She made an agonised gesture that prevented him from saying any more.

"Well, what do you want here?" she enquired, not exactly angry, but very much distressed.

"Nothing!" he replied under his breath. She sat down, supported her chin on her hand, and closed her eyes. She seemed to be very tired. Gioia too turned his head away, as if his gaze might be disturbed by her. Only now did he dare to examine the room. It was certainly a well-furnished, clean and by no means poor room, and its red tiled floor was covered with straw matting. Over the bed hung a portrait of Lord Byron, and beneath it the neck of a violin. With trembling chin, Gioia stood up and went towards it. Then he leant forward, supporting himself against the wall with his begging hand. He recognised the dark brown fine-grained wood; he had seen it in a hundred dreams and held it in his fingers — it was part of the instrument which had been stamped to atoms on the night of his arrest in Rome. Possibly this too was not real, none of it — the room, the hour; but even as a fantasy it was beautiful enough.

"Beautiful enough!" he repeated softly, and turned round. Checca watched him with her uneasy eyes. She too looked at the neck of the violin, then at her father; and in the slight

turn of her head which connected the two God's mercy was revealed. But she said nothing, nor did her face lose its worried expression. Gioia shuffled silently back to his place and moved his lips, but did not dare to look up.

"When were you set free?" she asked after a while.

"This morning," he replied softly.

"In God's name!" she exclaimed, as she had on entering, "but they are surely on your heels now . . ."

"Only as far as the Campuccio," he said, reassuringly. "I only moved from there when it was dark. And then . . ."

He stopped. He was still a little bit stupefied; he did not trust the moment, and dreaded a disappointment, an ironical obverse to his medal of happiness.

"Do you know what you may have brought about?" she asked, though not reproachfully, "just at this moment when. . . . Oh, but you know nothing about it," she added wearily.

"And it is not so very important," said Gioia, suddenly finishing her sentence for her. He smiled at her and this time his smile was pleasing. It seemed as if he had only just learnt to smile.

"What is important then?" she asked, growing confused and bowing her head.

"Oh, Checca, Checca!" he whispered, as if he were slightly cheered. Suddenly she looked up at him.

"G.G. is in Florence," she said gravely, "in the Ghetto, with Salomone — so take care!"

Gioia swayed from side to side on his chair.

"Is it necessary then," he muttered, "for me again . . . I might still be in the Bargello — remain in the Campuccio — with Guillotine . . ."

"It is necessary," said Checca firmly. "We need every one at present. You will remain another three days in the Campuccio, and then you will cautiously return to the Cortacce, through the cellars — do you hear?"

"Yes, yes," he nodded, and sank back wearily into his chair. They were silent for a while.

"Where are your glasses?" she asked at last. He smiled again and pointed to his coat pocket.

"There," he said. "I didn't want to frighten the *bimba,* the child outside, a good child, what is her name?"

"Giuliana," she replied, and smiled for the first time that evening. Then she added softly and tenderly: *"Babbo mio!"*

Quite bewildered, he raised his left hand.

"There are such things as evil days and good days!" he muttered as if he were fuddled with wine. "Today is a good day, full of good people. And Checca, *Checca mia. . . .*"

His begging hand groped towards her across the table. And she took it.

A RIDE IN HELL

I

It was only when, at the end of a strange and animated discussion, Madda Guerra begged her hostess to invite Caminer, the Chief of Police, at the first suitable opportunity, that the Princess retorted with a fairly definite "No!" That was at the beginning of the New Year, while the Conclave was still sitting in Rome, and the political excitement had become, as it were, more spiritual, before the election of the new Pope. Possibly this first act of resistance on Maria Corleone's part was, in addition to her personal superiority in those exciting days, influenced by the general stagnation of the forces about her — the kindness of the sovereign, the peace in the streets, the dying down of rumours, and the obvious failure of Madda's mission. For it was at about this time that she invited old Baron Steiner to become her daily guest at table once more.

"Why?" he asked with a friendly smile; but gazing at her with his frank eyes the while. "Is your pretty companion beginning to bore you?"

"Could you really believe she can be boring, Steiner?" she retorted. The old man shook his head.

"Don't shout till you're out of the wood, Maria!" he rejoined. "This is only the customary lull before the storm." And suppressing the remains of the smile that still lingered about the corners of his mouth, he concluded emphatically: "Don't be off-handed, my dear — towards anybody!"

The roots of this warning lay deeper than his shrewd imagination. For old Steiner had recently had an interview with a person whose importance was only equalled by the

unexpectedness of his visit. It was the Prime Minister del Monte, who had suddenly sent him a message an hour beforehand by a secretary who significantly enough came on foot, in the dark, dressed in the most sombre of black garments. He arrived just as Steiner, who ate very little, was partaking of a cold collation in his study, without moving from his writing table. The Baronissimo made no preparations for the reception of del Monte, although the Minister, whom socially he knew only slightly, was, of all the Court functionaries, the one man by whom he had from the very beginning set most store. As if from petty vanity, he did not even have the lacquer table, with the remains of his food and wine on it, removed from the side of his armchair, when the Marchese was announced, and did not even interrupt his work. He merely laid down his magnifying glass and a somewhat damaged engraving, when the door was opened a second time to admit his visitor, whom his old servant announced with the utmost respect. Only then did he quickly exchange his glasses for his monocle, and, looking straight into the tall man's aristocratic face, and allowing no dangerous interval for transitions and surmises, said directly the formal greetings were over:

"I presume, your Excellency has not come to me as a lover of the fine arts. There only remains, therefore, my other speciality — or shall we say at once, my friendship with your handful of a child. Old people should beware of wasting time — more particularly when they have heavy responsibilities. Is that not so, Marchese?"

Despite their difference of rank and station, the half-expressed good-will which now seemed, as it were by chance, to unite these two old men and enable them at once, as if by some magic community of spirit, to explain themselves, was, after all, only natural. Had their positions been reversed, del Monte would not have opened the conversation about the delicate matter in hand very differently. And Steiner knew this. They were both smiling faintly now as though each felt that the structure of their lives was more or less on a level,

and accordingly exchanged friendly greetings. Each experienced the joy of feeling that the achievements of a lifetime were tacitly acknowledged by his peer. It formed a rare interlude in the inevitable solitude of old age, and it could be felt in the faint vibrations of the air.

"Yes," said del Monte with a nod, "we can cut out everything superfluous. But I should like you to know that I am not here in my capacity as Head of the Government . . . that sounds laughable, does it not, Baron? I only mean that I came in the capacity of a friend — for the rest . . ."

He spoke with some hesitation, and kept his eyes averted from Steiner. The Baronissimo forced him to look into his frank grey eyes.

"I believe you, your Excellency," he said by way of encouragement, "and that admission is one of the rarest in my life!"

Del Monte supported his chin in his hand and spoke thoughtfully.

"I thank you, Signore. That is splendid — but I don't suppose you will be in a position to answer all my questions."

"No," replied Steiner immediately, "you understand that in our case I take a definite side — possibly more than you do, Marchese?"

The Minister raised his head in surprise.

"Perhaps," he rejoined gravely. "I may admit without further ado that I am an old admirer of the Princess, and have always understood . . . but, let that be! What I now wish to discuss with you is the great danger hanging over the head of our common friend, quite apart from mere politics. You are probably well aware of what I mean, Baron?"

"Yes," said Steiner. Del Monte's eyes were now clear, blue and a little hard.

"Can you estimate the extent of your influence over the Princess, Signore?" he asked.

"Certainly!" the Baron replied. "Its precise limits are known to her as well as to me."

"I thought as much," said del Monte, with a slight shrug of

the shoulders. "But I may as well confess to you at once that, in my opinion, you are the only person who can — let us say — avert the private catastrophe. As regards the political catastrophe, we are taking our own measures."

Steiner folded his small hands and let his head fall to one side.

"You are unfortunately over-estimating my power," he replied gravely. Del Monte was silent a while. Then he spoke almost hastily.

"You are, of course, at liberty to turn all I am now telling you — whether you agree with it or not — to the Princess' account. I should like to emphasise that point."

Steiner gave a silent nod. The Minister passed a hand over his eyes.

"Oh, but first of all there is just one point," he observed, with a gesture almost of embarrassment, "a neutral question which I put, as it were, man to man — old man to old man. The sovereign whom I love has not been informed by me of all these matters that are agitating us; he knows nothing about the Princess' connection with the revolutionary Party, nor the identity of her guest, Maddalena Guerra. Do you think this silence on my part is justified and consistent with a clean conscience? Can you give me an impartial opinion, Baron? It is a matter of some importance to me."

Steiner looked at the thin, anxious old face, and felt strangely attracted. Everything good and everything doubtful in people is being revealed to me at this wonderful moment, he thought to himself. But he hesitated to reply. Del Monte smiled a somewhat sickly smile.

"My question is not a trap," he added gently, "and your answer will in no way confirm the facts I know concerning the Princess. It is only a matter of preferring that slight humanitarian aid which I did not expect when I entered your house. I am sure you understand me, my dear sir?"

"Oh, yes," said Steiner, bending forward to draw nearer to his visitor. "And if I were in your place and loved the sov-

ereign, I should do exactly what you are doing. That is frank enough, and is dictated more by emotion than by reason."

Del Monte nodded his head, and as old men do, continued nodding for some time. He started when he heard the deep notes of the bell of San Lorenzo strike the hour outside. A finely curved baroque clock on the chimney-piece, with dull gold ornaments, chimed three quivering notes after it. The Marchese waited for it to stop chiming and then, for the first time, let his gaze wander over the thousand and one objects in the room, raising his hand as if to signify that he would not treat any objection very severely.

"Of course it is still open to question," he remarked with a frown, "whether the Princess is not maintaining her connection with the revolutionaries in the interests of the sovereign —as far as I can picture her as a political agent . . ."

He stopped, for he had seen the subtle mockery in the face of the Baronissimo, and at the same moment recollected the fairly detailed notes which Caminer, the Chief of Police, had brought with him from Milan in the form of a secret report on old Steiner.

"Well qualified political agents must after all be difficult to picture, your Excellency," said the latter with a smile. "That would be no proof of the contrary."

Del Monte smiled too and stroked his chin.

"I am only too willing to believe, Baron," he said kindly, that in this department of life also you are an expert. What is more, the Princess herself, some time ago, hinted at some such activity on her part."

"But in my case," said Steiner, "she proved it in an absolutely unmistakable manner." The Minister put his hands together and rested his chin on the tips of his fingers. Then contracting his white eyebrows into a frown he said in an undertone:

"Then it would be a very good thing, and very important too, if, before the arrest of Guerra's sister, she would prove

it to us too." He sighed faintly, and closed his eyes for a moment. "That is an unnecessary display of dialectics, is it not?"

"Yes," Steiner replied very gravely, "for she is very far from being an agent; she is a harassed creature who is at her wits' end."

Del Monte let his hands drop and stared at his host.

"Things are in a very bad way," he said, "but did she give you proof of that?"

"Yes."

Steiner nodded, as if he knew and encouraged his companion's thought. Del Monte became uneasy.

"There can be but one explanation of that," he cried; "she saved the sovereign from the attempt on his life in October."

Old Steiner had turned aside, and was toying with the magnifying glass. He made no reply. Del Monte scrutinised the little man's birdlike profile and looked astonished as if he were seeing him for the first time.

"One might even think of other incidents," he said slowly, "and in the end one might envy her well-informed position and the unobtrusiveness of her activity, Baron. Nevertheless it is incumbent on the sovereign, as sovereign, to be free from all sentimentality. Moreover, he is the guarantee for the safety of the State. So we two are useless and prevent nothing."

"Quite right!" agreed Steiner, "and we may perhaps derive some consolation from the fact that we are old, and that the movement whose birth we are witnessing is impersonal and elemental, and cannot be checked."

"I decline such consolation," cried the Minister, "you must surely understand . . ."

"When is the Princess' guest to be arrested?" Steiner interposed. Del Monte replied cautiously that the President of the *Buon Governo* alone knew, and that apparently he had plans of his own. He might be waiting for the expected insurrection in the northern States to break out. Steiner turned to face him.

"You must surely be aware, your Excellency, that you are risking the Princess' life, if the guest, when she is arrested, really turns out to be Guerra's sister. You have, I am sure, already heard of certain Party regulations?"

"I need your help, not your threats," said del Monte softly. "I have no right to interfere with the department of the Chief of Police!"

"Then you must have both the women arrested," said Steiner calmly. Del Monte stood up, and going up to the Baronissimo's arm-chair, laid his hand on his shoulder with a sudden familiarity to which Steiner's raised eyes seemed to consent.

"You now know a good deal, my dear friend," he said kindly, "and I know nothing, or extremely little. You are therefore the better equipped of the two. Turn your advantage to account, I implore you! And thus let us remain to some extent allies, in spite of our apparently conflicting friendships. Do you agree?"

"Yes," replied Steiner, holding out a hand, "and you ought not to love the sovereign, but you ought to tell him the truth. For it is better for him and his country for lovelessness to come from a man rather than from a woman friend."

The Minister looked at him in distress. Soon afterwards he left the house lost in thought.

* * * * *

"Be off-handed?" Maria Corleone repeated, astonished at Steiner's serious warning. She reflected again for a moment, then overcoming her hesitation, she continued: "After all, why should I not tell you, dear friend? The girl, who is apparently not getting enough entertainment out of the fat Abate, has now asked that President Caminer should be invited to sit next to her at dinner. I thought I was entitled to decline this request, and not only because I was doubtful about the Cavaliere's social standing."

The Baronissimo looked at his small hands.

"But why?" he asked thoughtfully. "Possibly both parties are equally interested in becoming more closely acquainted."

"But what if one day she expresses the desire to meet the Grand Duke?" Maria Corleone asked sharply, after a moment of astonished silence. The old man smiled shrewdly.

"That would not be the worst possible thing that could happen, in view of the Prince's character and his apparently inflexible determination to defend his position, provided," he added softly, "that the girl has no weapon on her, and that you, Maria, dared to take the step, which, after all, will one day be necessary."

"What step?" she asked, tense with curiosity. He shrugged his shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"Why to choose, Maria — between him and Guerra!"

2

In his last talk with Renzo Maddii in Borgunto, Guerra had certainly done the man an injustice, for until that day Madda had been given no hint that her brother had been obliged to leave his retreat in Fiesole and sink into complete anonymity, for which secret arrangements had been made in advance. Besides the news she had for him grew every day more scanty. The practical futility of her Florentine mission, her inability to obtain any precise information as to what was happening during this critical period, and the distressing reserve of the people about her, made her feel a strange sense of isolation which was extremely oppressive. Moreover, as the indignation and pain in her heart calmed down owing to her separation from her brother, her sense of guilt increased. She was worried because she could not learn the effect of her private communications to the Central Bureau, and did not know what they were leading to. She had not actually denounced her brother, but had merely pointed to the awkwardness of the situation, which forced the leader of the Tuscan Branch to remain outside the centre of action at a critical mo-

ment like the present, and to issue his orders through a system of communications that was much too complicated; and suggested that the recent failures had possibly been due to this. The girl had signed the coded report with the sign used by Scaleterra who was in custody, whose possible opposition was not unknown to the Central Bureau and whom Guerra himself also suspected of being secretly entrusted with the task of supervising him. Thus the report, which was sent through the ordinary post and dispatched to an address that could not arouse suspicion, might certainly appear as if it had been smuggled out of prison by the subordinate leader, and secretly forwarded, the reasons for avoiding sending it by courier being obvious enough!

When her brother had spoken to her about their separation, and had light-heartedly confirmed her instinctive suspicions as to who her successor was to be, the ingenious planning and drawing up of the report had been the work of ten revengeful minutes. But her intention in the matter remained quite clear in her own mind even afterwards. It had obviously been the outcome of a woman's jealousy. Her confidence in her own powers led her to argue that her good and loyal work in Florence would, after all, provide her brother with the means of parrying the blow which might be levelled at him from Paris. But, in view of Guerra's reputation in the Party, this seemed by no means certain.

What was less clear to her in the background of her motivation, was her feeling against Maria Corleone, which was the cause of her soul's great trouble. In this connection, petty expedients for disturbing nights of love were of no avail. For as far as the Princess was concerned, it was a case of one thing or the other, she must either love her or destroy her. She had not yet gone sufficiently far to decide which; for her blood still yearned for some sort of physical expression, and when she beheld the Princess, she was overcome by a sensuous desire to touch and bewilder her. Moreover, when she was calm and not burning with passion, she felt in the other

woman's love for her brother, the vague charm of resignation which always inspires kindness. Whereupon she perceived how lacking in kindness she was, both in spirit and in body, and in the malicious fate of her love. And then when everything changed, she found that she alone was fatally entangled through her sinister profession, and no longer thinking of how to treat the Princess, was obliged, step by step, to acquiesce in her severance from her, while her thoughts of her brother — of the brother she had betrayed, as she had already come to regard him — weighed more heavily upon her, and tortured her as cruelly as anyone can be tortured.

Gradually her chances of speaking with her fellows grew fewer and fewer. The Princess confined her relations with her to the barest minimum of what was necessary, and on various pleas of indisposition, avoided every kind of social entertainment, so as not to be obliged to be seen in public with her. Nor indeed did Don Lionello present himself again when once he had satisfactorily proved that the lady's charms lay in safe keeping behind a hedge of political thorns, and Caminer's official object had become apparent. So all that remained was the pinched face of the taciturn Renzo Maddii, whose tedious love only seldom gleamed in his eyes. In short all she had left was the polite greeting, the formal phrases and the insufferable look of the mortal enemy. For that was how she secretly regarded Baron Steiner.

Her lively and sociable nature was much more deeply oppressed by the silence and the human indifference about her than by the dangers that menaced her, though, as she was well aware, these were by no means insignificant, in spite of the fact that they were, after all, intimately bound up with the well-protected fate of Maria Corleone. And indeed it was the latter consideration that constituted the deep and cunning motive of her presence at the Princess' house. Her desire to meet the Chief of Police — which at the time had been half coquetry and half intended as a means of influencing the Abate — was much more in the nature of a revolt against the

hidden workings of fate, the daring of desperation, and a speculation with her body as the stake, than serious tactics, or obedience to orders. She accordingly first summoned Renzo Maddii, whose royal livery hung sullenly and unconvincingly on his lank body. She had of late adopted a somewhat haughty tone towards him, as if she wanted to make him believe in the reality of his flunkeydom, as, in the beginning, she had tried to make the Princess believe in their cousinship.

"Let my brother know," she commanded, "that Vacca is really keeping away, no doubt in pursuance of definite orders, and that I am now trying to get into direct touch with Caminer."

Maddii looked desperately at her, as no servant would have done, and shook his head.

"But you must, in any case, get his consent to that," he declared, "before you attempt to arrange it. As far as I am aware, such an idea has never been discussed."

"Very well," she concluded. "Then you go up there. You need not be back till tonight. I shall not speak to the Princess before then."

Renzo knew that it was impossible for him to obtain the leader's consent in the time, because he would only get into touch with Checca that evening, and would not be able to receive her reply from Guerra until the next morning. Hitherto the few messages Madda had sent to her brother had not required any immediate answer, so that Renzo had had no difficulty in concealing the latter's change of abode. For the moment his face, although not obviously embarrassed, bore only the signs of the effort made by a none too nimble mind to find the proper answer. But the girl had grown suspicious, acute and quick of ear, as solitary people frequently become — as well as those with guilty consciences; for, after all she was expecting an echo from her appeal to Paris.

Eventually Renzo had recourse to his good-natured boorishness, his most familiar weapon.

"I don't see at all," he said, jerking his shoulders with boyish defiance, "I don't see at all why the matter is so pressing, and must be settled before the evening."

"Oh?" Madda replied, pursuing her lips. And she looked sharply at him. Renzo stepped back mechanically.

"How can I be certain of finding him?" he exclaimed, gesticulating with increased confusion.

"Since when has my brother ceased to live at Borgunto?" she enquired — but she immediately regretted the question. For Maddii had suddenly ceased to be awkward and embarrassed, and was staring at her, scrutinising her features, trying to find some sort of connection between her remark and his, and already on the point of becoming indignant.

"That ought not to concern you, Signorina," he replied in a choking voice, accompanied by strange spasmodic movements of his arms. Then he whispered: "And God help you, Madda, if it really does concern you . . ."

The girl went very pale. So direct a blow from her anonymous venture had not come within her reckoning. And as she could not tell what it was that lay behind Maddii's outburst, she jumped to the worst conclusions — both for her brother and herself — and her strength forsook her. She clutched the gold cords of the man's livery and panted:

"In God's name, has anything happened to him?"

"What should happen to him?" Renzo rejoined rudely. "Why him?"

That was plain enough and it was meant for her alone. Charged, outlawed and sentenced! Did she not know her brother Guerra when he was on the defensive, and the justice of the Party, which was sinister, pitiless and unfailing? She ran her fingers up and down the white sleeve of the livery, and pressed herself forward, crouching behind his body as behind a shield, and muttering poor, helpless words of love. For a moment he was bewildered, and with his arms hanging down leant against the wall to which she had pressed him.

But in a moment he pulled himself together, and struggled free of her.

"This is sheer fright, Madda," he whispered, "it is bad of you."

Madda stepped back and passed both her hands across her brow and hair.

"So now you are going either to him or to Checca and will report me?" she said with a smile of distress, addressing him by the familiar "thou."

"No," he replied. "If you have done anything Maddelena, anything against him that is not right, he will know it without my telling him. Of course I love you, Madda — but you should not address me as 'thou' just at this moment."

He did not look at her as he spoke. She had turned round, and was biting her lips. She would have to wait until the morning for her brother's answer about Caminer. And then he left.

She was one of those high-spirited women who in moments of deep spiritual depression need only to be reminded of their powerful bodies in order to have their trust in life revived. The shock she had received from Renzo's dark hints had been overcome as soon as she had heard from his honest lips the assurance that he would not play the part of informer. Moreover, the whole thing seemed too vague. Guerra's suspicions of her were uncertain, and Renzo's were perhaps no more than the conclusions of an acute logician, who would now hold his tongue. And after all they were every one of them human beings, without any special protection against their feelings. This encouraging line of reasoning was prompted by her body. The second during which Renzo had retreated in almost idiotic petrifaction against the wall, under the light pressure of her body, sufficed as a touchstone for her. She felt now, almost without taking thought, that her solitude was both deep and uncanny, because her capable body, ever ready to come to grips, had no contact with any human being. In the strangely exalted half hour after Renzo's departure, which she spent

restlessly wandering round the delicate furniture of the boudoir, her excited soul seized her body like a lance, and charged like an Amazon against the host of her fleeing foes.

The fact that in such a mood she did not wait for a word from her brother was comprehensible enough. And possibly when she went to join the Princess, she had no intention of turning the conversation on Caminer, but only wanted to recover the ground she had lost. The sudden dash into political intrigue, towards the end, had been the outcome of her own temperament.

Maria Corleone no longer cared to have conversations of any length with the girl. The constant tension of the last few weeks had made her nervous, and in her present condition she was unable, in spite of her self-control, to hide her displeasure. Her eyelids began to quiver; hard lines, that made her look old, formed about her mouth, and when she felt the girl's bodily eagerness for the fray, she was at a loss to find the few friendly, colourless words with which at other times she concealed her real thoughts. She sat in her deep English easy chair, let her needlework drop into her lap, and silently and half fearfully watched Madda approach her from the door.

At that moment the girl was extraordinarily, almost painfully, beautiful. It was as if her bodily energy had been embellishing itself with magic cosmetics, or else was dazzling the eyes of the elder woman, as if it had done so. Maria Corleone suddenly felt the lines of age about her mouth quite distinctly, as though they had been traced with a needle. She raised a lace handkerchief to her lips. But now she felt tiny lines forming under her eyes, and the thin rays of anguish spreading to her temples. Madda's face was now so close to her that she could feel her breath, and the girl's youth burned her like the sun.

Feeling faint, the Princess let her head fall back.

"Don't torment me so!" she whispered beneath Madda's kiss. The girl, perceiving her advantage, relentlessly embraced her and enveloped her in her warm life.

" You must not treat me like a leper, Maria," she wailed, " I can't bear it."

" Yes, yes," Maria Corleone replied with a nod, and stroked the girl's hair. " But you are no longer honest with me, my child."

Madda did not release her.

" But none of us are," she said, with a caustic laugh, over the Princess' brow. Maria Corleone frowned. She began to take up an attitude of resistance, and her thoughts ranged themselves against the girl's brutal tactics. She pushed her gently away.

" Everything might be different, Madda," she said, " if you did not make me feel so plainly how much I must be on my guard with you."

The girl knelt down beside her on the upholstered arm of the chair, and taking her averted face in her hands forced it round to look at her own which was slightly above it.

" What might be different then, Maria? " she asked with a frank look. " Everything else is surely of no importance at all? "

" Oh, no! " Maria Corleone rejoined softly; and then after some hesitation, she added: " We surely see him from two different angles! "

" That is false! " cried Madda, losing all control. " That is your terrible mistake, Maria! You need not pretend to be too shy to understand what I am saying. I refuse even to consider your horror, so that you may at last understand . . ."

The Princess tried to rise, but she could not get by Madda, who was leaning across her. Very much distressed she remained seated.

" Surely it is going too far to say such a thing," she said, in somewhat shaky tones, " one ought to settle such things with oneself. And how it must weigh on him."

" Why? Why? " Madda cried wildly and seized her wrists, " why should you not be able to feel disgusted with him, your Majesty? "

"Poor child!" Maria Corleone muttered in soft motherly tones. This unshaken belief in his cleanliness, the fact that the Princess had seen through her wicked lie, and seemed to have heard and repeated the very two words that he had uttered in that dreadful hour, drove Madda almost mad.

"Poor?" she said spitefully, trembling with suppressed rage, "Don't you know how rich I am, don't you see it already?"

"I do not see it," replied the Princess calmly, "but what I wonder is where it is all going to lead."

"To politics first of all — as he wishes it should. And that means to revolution, your Highness."

"Indeed!" said Maria Corleone with sudden coldness. "For the moment, at all events, cut all that out."

"That is a mistake," said Madda hastily, "that is your fundamental mistake, Maria. Do try to show yourself worthy of him!"

Maria Corleone raised her chin.

"I think it is time for us to part today, Madda."

The girl immediately sprang to her feet, and stepped away.

"Forgive me," she said, "but I have not yet told you the orders."

"Well, go on," said the Princess, and with a nervous expression on her face, she got up. Madda looked at her attentively and continued.

"As I am making no headway with Vacca, it is necessary in the interest of our Cause for President Caminer to be induced to visit your house. There will surely be opportunity enough during the Carnival to invite him without exciting any comment."

For a brief moment the Princess was silent. Then she replied coldly:

"I don't like the idea of that man in my house. If you like the idea of yourself in his, I have nothing to say against your fulfilling your wish."

Madda bowed her head, like a cat about to spring. It was an

odious habit she had when she was about to utter a threat. In icy tones, she asked:

"Must I regard that as your final refusal to obey the orders of the Party . . . ?"

But the Princess had already left the room.

3

On his return to the Ghetto, Gioia at first saw very little sign of the presence of the great Guerra. The black stone wave of the Cortacce closed over him and, with its breastwork of obscurity and misery, offered him sad repose and peace. Salomone gave him a friendly welcome, and, as usual, asked no questions. His face was still yellow, and in his heavy-lidded eyes, which were really sad, there was the same curious look of joy, which emerging from his innermost being, sometimes made him look a little bit mad. It was impossible to extract anything from this fanatically intense and reserved man about his important guest, who was hidden somewhere in the crazy house, directing fate; nor was any more to be discovered from Checca, who came suspiciously often. But, after all, Gioia was not inquisitive, and he had, moreover, returned home with the disquieting burden of two experiences. The first was the sight of two spies' lanterns quite close to the front door of Checca's house, when he had left it that evening at about ten o'clock, in response to a sudden sharp order from his daughter. He had gone, although he reminded her that the lateness of the hour made it dangerous, and had even offered to spend the night in a chair in the passage, despite the fact that she had already been in bed some time and appeared to have slept. And was he not in any case sitting perfectly still in the furthest corner of the room, with his face to the wall, and had remained in this position ever since she had begun to undress? Whether the two spies were only there by chance, or whether they were there for some nefarious purpose — possibly they had, after all, followed him in his devious journey to his daughter's

house — was the doubt that tormented him even in the Ghetto. The two spies had flashed their lamps in his face, but had not stopped him or followed him when he went by cautious roundabout ways back to the hefty Guillotine's beer-shop. The latter received his late visitor with a few good-natured curses, and put him in the only spare room, over the bar, between a coarse couple who were making love, and a snoring drunkard.

The second experience occurred three days later, when he had again ventured to go as far as the right bank of the Arno. He was on his way back to the Ghetto, when, feeling a sudden uncontrollable aversion to the prospect of the difficult and strenuous walk through the subterranean passage from the particular house in the Via della Nave, and through the cellars under the Ghetto wall as far as the Cortacce, he resolved to stop on the Piazza del Olio and beg in the dark, so as to wait until he could smuggle himself into the crowd of hawkers and pedlars, as they poured through the gate of the Ghetto on their way home. But just as he was lurching through the gateway, and wishing a friendly good night to a hawker who had recognised him, a feeling that observant eyes were on his back forced him to turn round, and he saw in one of the upper windows of the gate-house, the head of the same neatly dressed secret agent who had allowed his heart to be touched to the extent of giving him alms, observing him with cold attention. Gioia had sufficient presence of mind to go calmly on and spend some time loafing about the Piazza della Fontana, intending to leave the Ghetto again through the same gate, as if he had merely been on an innocent begging expedition in the Jewish quarter. But before reaching the gate, he met the secret agent, accompanied by his less friendly colleague, probably engaged in tracking him down. It seemed to him certain that they must have concluded he was on his way back again, and that he had only been paying a casual visit to the Ghetto. Nevertheless, he was by no means free from anxiety, and exercised the greatest circumspection in picking his way from the gate of the Ghetto to the communicating house

in the Via della Nave. Here he got the proprietor, one of the oldest members of the Party in the centre of the town, to open the way to the cellars for him, and by the light of a guttering little oil lamp, he groped his way through the long underground passage, on the slippery floor of which he could hardly keep upright, and the sepulchral air of which tortured his weak lungs.

Thus, when he first returned to the Cortacce, he had to try to make the best of these experiences, and all the evil possibilities they entailed, of which he never mentioned a word, even to Checca. For his daughter maintained an attitude of professional hardness, just as she had done on that magic day when she had harshly and angrily insisted on his leaving her, allowing no vestige of the new feeling to appear. At last even the stuffy hospitality of his refuge no longer seemed safe to him. He seemed to be conscious of lightning behind the incessant rumbling noise and vapours of misery about him. Somewhere in the neighbourhood the invisible hand was at work, picking up the threads of the rebellion, as the impatient manager of a marionette show gathers together the strings before a performance. Even in the narrow confines of his room, and in the passage with its little square patch of sky overhead, Gioia detected the growing tension of its hateful activities; he felt the hostile power invading the place like gas. It was impossible for him to protect himself against it, and the sun, which was framed by the bent gutters above, seemed, when he looked indignantly up at it from his seat at the door, to be already burning with its old enmity, as if it were not January at all.

Checca came suspiciously often. She would enter his room to see him at the most unusual hours, say a few words or nothing at all, show her zeal-jaundiced face with its wild shock of grey hair, appear at the door at the end of the passage, filling the air of the damp room, laden with the smell of blood and meat, with her scent, which afforded such a striking contrast, and then disappear again with a sharp admonitory nod. Gioia

became ever more and more conscious that these calls were not so much visits as rounds of inspection. He now perceived that her person was the most powerful vehicle of the hostile idea, and was apparently entrusted with the mission of infecting him or his environment with the poison. Soon things had reached such a pass that when she appeared the same malicious look came into his naked eyes, as when they met the hostile glare of the sun.

"Yes, well, what is it . . . ?" he would ask at length, when her gaunt face was once again seen in the doorway; but he would look vindictively straight in front of him at the grated window in the wall opposite, where the big spider lived who came every morning to a particular corner of the window-sill, to drink up the last drops of coffee which he used to pour out for it from his tin saucer. His relations with this spider had always been most friendly, because it was so silent and unexacting. The old man set special store by the creature just at this time, for it did not retaliate upon him for his long absence by keeping away or appearing strange, but came back at once for its coffee, as if no dreadful interval had elapsed since its last drink. At sight of the spider, and as a result of the thoughts it started in his mind, he forgot his rebellious question, as well as his daughter, who was standing in the doorway, and paid no heed even to her silence. It was only when, with her left shoulder pressed against the jamb of the door, she craned her neck and looked down on him, that, with a pang of fear, he was reminded of her presence. He looked at her and felt frightened. His conscience was not clear.

"Oh, Checca!" he murmured quite humbly. "Look here . . ."

But he had nothing to say. It was merely an attempt at conciliating her. Looking thoughtful and grieved, she continued to gaze silently at him, as if she were waiting for him to say something more. Then suddenly he felt that her thoughts were no more concerned with him than his, a moment ago, concentrated on the spider, had been with her. But just then she

asked him how he was, startling him and making him suspicious.

"Why?" he enquired. She replied with a sentence which sounded strange on her lips — to the effect that it would soon be necessary for every one of them to summon all his strength, no matter to what post he might happen to be appointed: With spiteful eagerness Gioia replied:

"You can report me as available for any kind of prison."

Checca shook her head gently.

"It isn't very likely to be that," she said softly. "I don't even know in your case what you will be called upon for." She paused and glided slowly back across the room, and leant out of the door. All he could see of her form was her hand, which clung to the jamb. "Besides . . ." her voice sounded out of the darkness and her fingers slid up and down the jamb, reminding the old man of the neck of the violin and his own nimble fingers on the strings — and the melody in his brain grew so loud that it drowned Checca's faltering words.

"*Babbo,*" she said, after a while, reminding him without the help of any particular emphasis or tone of voice of the word of his fate. Nor was it the word itself, which interrupted his ghostly note on the upstroke, and his meditations, but her hand which had left the jamb of the door.

"What are you saying, Checca?" he enquired, looking bewildered into the room.

"Yes," — her voice rejoined somewhat indistinctly, as if the words of their broken conversation could only meet by chance — "I too must live here now. The police have discovered the house, in which . . . but you know what I mean, and my nice little room, and more or less what our connection is — owing to you, of course . . . the other day . . ."

Gioia nodded his head timidly, and then let it fall forward. For a little while he heard nothing except the sounds of a man praying. His whiny sing-song voice suddenly growing louder, seemed to issue from a crack in the wall above their heads and

soar upwards to a stern and merciless God. Then he heard his daughter's voice again.

"But you need have no qualms on that account. I have said nothing to him — and that is not why he has summoned you."

Gioia stood up and with his begging hand felt the wall behind him; it was there right enough, as crumbly and friendly as ever.

"Who — who . . ." he groaned almost tearfully. Checca's face came out of the room, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Didn't you really hear what I said just then?" she asked. Gioia whined emphatically:

"Nothing! Nothing! By the Holy Virgin! What do you expect of me? I am deaf . . ."

"G.G. wants to make your acquaintance — that's what I was telling you," Checca said, calmly interrupting him. Gioia sobered down. Then letting his head fall more than ever over his right shoulder, as was his habit, when he wanted to look up, he bent forward from the hips, and with his left eye blinked up at the sky. The sun was still there, setting the loftiest visible part of the roof aflame. When he turned his gaze once more to the narrow passage, he was so dazed that he could not even see his kind friend the spider in the dark corner of the window.

"It must come to an end some day," he muttered, and then, as if he felt his words might be misunderstood, he added: "This life. . . ."

"It will have an end," Checca assured him.

* * * * *

The outbreak of the revolution in Central Italy was fixed by the Central Bureau to take place the week after the election of the Pope had been finally ratified. The difference between the present venture and the abortive insurrection of the autumn, consisted in the fact that the greatest possible independence of action was to be given to each individual State, from Lombardy and Venetia to the Neapolitan frontier. Guerra

clearly perceived from the instructions given for the movement in Tuscany that the intention of the Central Bureau was to deprive him of his former command over the whole of the operations, and to employ him only in the small section which, in relation to the general movement for Independence, still remained the least important. For the wire-pullers in Paris were well aware that any sudden overthrow of the firmly established Grand Duchy was inconceivable. Thus in general outline, the abortive October rising remained much the same. But it was not his degradation in the political hierarchy of his Party, nor the nature of the impending rebellion, which was still as purposeless as ever, that oppressed Guerra's soul, but the thought of the secret orders, which he was to open on the day of the Pope's election, and concerning the nature of which he was not in the slightest doubt. For it did not require any very great shrewdness on his part to guess that the attempt on the Grand Duke's life was to be repeated and that he would be selected for the deed.

On the very first night he spent under Salomone's roof he made sure of the fact; for he felt that certainty was more important for him than the observance of the time limit, which it was hardly possible for anyone to check. He had therefore unsealed the document, saw the broken line above the cipher representing the Grand Duke, and read his own sign at the conclusion of the fatal order.

If this decision on the part of the Central Bureau were the outcome of a denunciation and a punishment for his behaviour during the events of October, he had every reason to feel extremely anxious. A second act of disobedience would inevitably lead to the appointment of a Party tribunal to try him. And with the object of not destroying the discipline of its members, the crimes of prominent leaders were usually punished by the Party, not by the assassination of the delinquent, as in the case of subordinate members, but by ordering him to commit suicide within a specified interval of time.

Now Guerra had never been such a fanatical adherent of the Cause as to lose his respect for human life, or all reluctance to forfeit his own. The theatrical spirit of his youth, both in public and private life, had by its very superficiality always recoiled with horror before the prospect of ultimate death. But now that the tide of time had brought him to years of discretion and he had learnt the manifold possibilities of fate, he wished to pursue his political path without any dramatic trappings, and was endowed with a clearer and more humane conception of the means whereby the triumph of the Cause might be achieved. For the Cause itself was a good one, worthy of the sacrifice of a lifetime. It had developed with the years of his life, which had stripped it as he himself had been stripped, of all theatrical trappings, and made it more mature, grander and truer. The ideas behind it had developed gradually like his own personality, uninterrupted and compelling in their reality. It was good it should be so; but it could have but one end. In another generation the development would be complete, and by the very force of natural law, without the distressing help of mediæval bloodshed and romanticism, the national idea would have become a nation. The divine reconciliation of the contrasts between the inner and the outer world could be made only in human terms. All kinds of links, which could be created by the human spirit, and were conducive to the end in view, were conceivable. But blood and human justice, powerful by tradition, worked otherwise — and the staggering experience of history could not maintain that they worked badly. Guerra began to perceive wherein lay the tragedy of his life — he was not young enough to take the more exalted view, and already too deeply compromised by the practised brutality of his calling.

Guerra's was not a heroic nature. He possessed neither his sister's uncalculating aggressiveness nor Checca's stubborn passion. He was a brave man who had shown some art in building up a solid and fairly stately house out of the stage-wings of his youth, and had been obliged to retain the heroic

manner, just as the soldier is obliged to retain the shoulder straps and belt of his uniform. His exceptional position, which forced him whenever he appeared in public to create an impression, had, owing to the peculiar nature of his honesty, forced him to adopt the pose of a fanatic and had won him his reputation as a revolutionary. The necessity for keeping up appearances kept him wonderfully erect both in mind and body, even when he was in danger of immediate death, and his heart was beating madly with fear. But hitherto all such crises had been more or less personal in their nature, and he settled them himself, with his own nerves, invisibly, behind the decorous façade of his position as leader. But the danger that seemed to be threatening him now was death in two forms, the death of another in addition to his own — a thing so terrible that he could not think of it or face it.

Nevertheless, he remained outwardly calm even now, warily and resolutely active, and every inch the leader. Checca, who knew him well, saw his uneasiness at first only in his eyes. He had not even told her of the reasons that had made him leave Borgunto, allowed no suspicion to fall on Madda and never mentioned the terrible thing that lay in front of him. He was astonished to find how small a part indignation at his sister's underhand game played in his thoughts. Where could the impulse to find excuses for her in his own mind, and to shield her from Checca's dangerous enmity, arise, except in his beautiful love? Was his love for her beautiful? He thought over it a good deal. And far removed as he was from the temptation of that one dreadful night, he said "Yes." And then from her his thoughts wandered to other women, who had wound their tendrils about his life, with the love that was service, self-sacrifice and generosity — of Checca, of Maria the woman and Maria the child — while under the flashlight of memory thousands of faces arose which smiled joyfully at him, him the leader, the handsome fascinating man; and once again he heard the ecstatic blessing Salomone had pronounced on his head, and felt the shy passionate kiss the man had

imprinted on his hand. Before the image of so much living tenderness, he grew weak and cried:

"My God, my God! Who will help me?"

Checca was with him; possibly he had forgotten she was there. They were both terrified. She looked speechlessly at him. His face, owing to the short beard and moustache which he had allowed to grow in the Ghetto, and probably too as the result of lack of fresh air and exercise, looked sallow and sickly. But he forced himself to smile, and holding out a hand to her, he said:

"Well, anything else, Checca?"

Taken aback by his obvious hope that she had not heard his cry of secret woe, she answered softly:

"No—only that Gioia is back in the Cortacce again."

"Gioia?" he repeated gently, drawling out the syllables, and he reflected. Checca suddenly raised her arms and without apparent reason gave a faint cry. Guerra, whose back was turned to her, paid no heed to it.

His wish to see the old man was only expressed a few days later quite casually, as if the idea had only just occurred to him. But Checca was not to be deceived.

"That decrepit old man?" she enquired hesitatingly. "I don't quite understand."

Guerra raised his head. His eyes looked angry.

"This evening," he said curtly. She left the room. He remained seated a little while, his fingers twitching nervously, and his face distorted, as if he had tasted something bitter. All of a sudden he waved his arms. And then his mind started off, at a furious pace, riding his infernal thought like a horse to hell. Suddenly he stood up and left the house for the first time since he had moved into the Ghetto.

"Isn't it dangerous, Signore?" Salomone muttered, running out of his shop. "It is still quite light."

"It's all right," said Guerra, putting him off with a friendly smile. "There's danger everywhere."

Even when he reached the gate leading to the Mercato

Vecchio, he was still so wrapped about in his grey and foggy depression, that he did not know how far into the arms of danger it might drive him, that danger which, if he but chose to raise a finger, he could transform into shameful release. But when in the bend of the gate he caught sight of the first man in uniform, a wall reaching to heaven seemed to separate him from the placid old soldier in his busby; the step that would have brought him up to the man was impossible to take, and the words he would have spoken — the words: "I am Guerra" — were but an aftermath of the insanity from which he was recovering. Things happened differently. As a hawker in front of him was walking with one shoulder slightly raised above the other, he too lifted his left shoulder and with his neck craned, walked along with enormous strides. He went through the gate and entered the busy, indifferent Mercato, attracting no more attention than any other Jewish pedlar; then turning down the Via Pellicceria, he was soon on the banks of the Arno in front of the Palazzo Corleone. He asked to be allowed to see the young Countess on business, saying he was the jeweller, Krieg — he gave the German name — from the Via Fiesolona, and that her ladyship would understand. The porter, slightly suspicious, tried to pronounce the name. Whereupon Guerra tore a corner from the newspaper the man was reading, and with a piece of pencil he had found on the way, in Salomone's long overcoat, he wrote on the scrap of paper, in his small, firm handwriting: "G. Krieg — Gioia — Fiesolana" — adding a tiny cipher, concealed in the flourish of the name. The porter, swallowing down his indignation at the damage done to his paper, rang for a lackey as soon as the masterful visitor looked at him. A few minutes later, Renzo Maddii was running down the broad staircase as if he were trying to leave his badly fitting livery behind him.

"Signore . . . Signore . . ." he stammered, pale and agitated.

"Krieg!" Guerra repeated firmly, to restore his equanimity. "Krieg, the jeweller, about the earrings . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Renzo vaguely. "Follow me."

The two disappeared into the hall. The porter gazed after them, whereupon returning heavily to the gate, he kept an attentive eye on the passers-by on the Ponte Santa Trinità. Presently he turned his huge head, with its pompous cocked hat, sharply to the right. There, at the corner of the quay and the Via Tornabuoni, a middle-aged man, with his face turned up towards the sky and his eyes half closed, was leaning against the wall, keeping up a continual patter of chords on a guitar. Now and again he would open his mouth, as if he had some melody in his mind. A card in his hat proclaimed to the world that he was a blind musician wholly deserving of pity.

"Faustino!" cried the porter to the beggar, "has the fat fellow been this way yet?"

The musician mournfully shook his head, as if he were lost in thought, without turning his face from the clouds, or interrupting his playing.

"He must come to us!" said the porter, and went in.

* * * * *

Renzo ventured to cast one more agitated glance into the room and then closed the door on the brother and sister. Madda stared at her brother as if he had been a ghost. She was leaning against the wall, tongue-tied, terrified and helpless, as she had been when he came in. When they were alone, Guerra went up to her and kissed her. It was a dreadful kiss deliberately devilish. Madda blushed vividly, and gave a faint groan.

"So you are in the Ghetto?" she asked at last.

"Had you not heard — from Renzo?"

"No, on my honour!"

Guerra held her hand tightly and looked into her eyes that grew big with fear.

"You have made a fool of yourself, Madda," he said softly and tenderly. "You have done some dreadful things — God knows how it will all end! I might even ask you right away what you propose to do with Caminer. You are therefore sus-

pect, and without me would be in the most imminent danger, child. . . ."

Her face was pale as death.

"Caminer is close on my heels," she wailed. "I think that at any moment he can have me arrested. It is the one and only means of preventing him."

"The one and only means," he said, turning upon her with a smile, "is to tell him where I am . . . because you will never be able to play Judith to that man and do away with him."

"I don't know what you want me to do," she said in quivering tones. "Must I leave here now and go to the Ghetto?"

He shook his head.

"That would come to the same thing as your little affair with the Chief of the Police," he said, "for I hold myself responsible for your safety. Besides, you have done nothing here yet — and we are on the eve of the crisis. And, after all, you could hardly be arrested as long as the Princess can rely on the Crown; for she would naturally dread the consequences which, in that case, would threaten her from our side. Those are the two guarantees which still secure your safety. How is Maria?"

The girl was glad that the name gave her a chance of escaping from the oppressive ambiguity of the conversation. She replied sharply that the Princess was now wholly estranged from her as well as from the Cause, and had initiated at least old Steiner into the secrets of the Party. She had at first emphatically refused to accede to her request that Caminer should be invited, and had made no response even to a plain warning. A little later, however — old Steiner had been there during the interval — she had, without offering any reason, agreed to Caminer's visit.

"The Baronissimo," Guerra interrupted, "knows too much, much too much — it is dangerous to combine one's profession with friendship; it may end badly. Perhaps I may still have an opportunity of a word with her; for she must not plunge into any treacherous policy, the poor soul! . . ." Guerra spoke nervously, choppily, almost absent-mindedly. "And the old

man — you have already warned me once about him — can I send a few people into the house, when the business starts? "

He stopped and drew her to him. " Could you kill anyone? " he asked her suddenly, speaking quite close up to her face. She seemed to be turned to stone beneath his gaze.

" I don't know . . ." she whispered, " perhaps . . . but you ask, because you want something, Gasto . . ."

" Well, let it be, let it be," he said, soothing her, and allowing his lips to glide over her eyes, " but would you care to live, if I were no more . . ."

" What . . . what do you mean? " she cried, springing back wildly.

" Could you? " he ventured to ask again.

" No, no! "

With gentle fingers he closed her lips that had parted in horror.

" Well, let it be," he said again, with a look of almost mad reflection. " That is as well; that comforts me, you see. These are only thoughts . . ."

As he did not move, Madda shook his arm.

" Gastino . . ." she murmured stupefied, " this will lead to a disaster. . . . You must keep your senses . . . you at least must . . ."

" Oh, senses! " he cried, and laughed softly, " all I have said is only thoughts."

She made an agonised gesture.

" Why did you really come? Do give me clear instructions at least! "

" Hold him back! " he exclaimed roughly, " hold back the Chief of Police — until the Pope is elected! Then I can let fly — at the madness, the soap-bubble idiocy, which stares me in the face. Tell him I am in Fiesole, in Setignano, in the brothels of San Fredino, under Maria Corleone's bed . . . to the devil with him! . . . unless he is already better informed." He laughed loudly and maliciously, and then murmured something to himself.

"What did you say just then?" she said, opening her eyes wide. He looked at her for a moment.

" . . . and that would be the best that could happen," he repeated. The little mounds of rage formed over her nose.

"For Maria Corleone?" she enquired spitefully. "That would not be very original." He gave her a puzzled look. "Do you wish to see her?" she continued, and her lips were thin as she spoke. "She ought to be at home . . ."

He shook his head and frowned, as if in fact he was thinking the matter over.

"No," he replied slowly, "today my thoughts insist on running in a groove. It is almost like an *idée fixe* — really! In the end I should only want her to tell me whether she could shoot the Grand Duke!"

Madda fell back to the wall. She opened her lips before she repeated the little word that moved her so deeply. . . .

" . . . too . . ."

* * * * *

In a strange voice, without any preamble, and with a distant look in his eyes, Guerra praised Renzo Maddii for his bravery and reliability, as they descended the rambling staircase, with its majestically broad shallow steps. Renzo made no reply, cast his eyes to the floor, and remained standing on the last landing. Guerra wished him a curt good-bye over his shoulder. In the doorway stood the porter, stiff and angular, pompous and indifferent, like the round staff in his hand. He did not stir when the suspicious looking tradesman passed. His gaze stretched like a barrier across the doorway, and he did not move his head until the stranger had gone out of his plane of vision. Then, with a jerk, he turned his head to the left and raised his eyebrows. No sound accompanied this movement, but the stranger, who was already on the threshold, turned quickly and suspiciously round, as if to avert a blow that he expected to be levelled from behind. The porter gazed haughtily over his head. Opposite the doorway, leaning against

the side of the quay, stood Don Lionello, who had already with his eyebrows returned the porter's sign. The man in the cocked hat was no longer concerned with what happened.

Guerra, whose glance had darted from the porter across to the Abate, felt for a moment as if the broad black mass of a man had dissolved into a dark mist, concealing everything. But he continued on his way towards the Ponte Santa Trinità, hardly aware that he was adopting the ruse of going in the opposite direction to that by which he had come, his left shoulder slightly raised, and limping visibly. Don Vacca did not follow him.

* * * * *

Salomone's state room, which had been reverently placed at the leader's disposal, with its furniture upholstered in green plush, its oval pictures of ugly women, and a strong smell of must and camphor, afforded at least a few moments of peace. Guerra lay down on the short hard sofa, and held his head. His body was tired, and he felt little stabs in his excited heart. A thousand pictures of his flight through the town still flitted before his eyes — his hurried journey to the left bank and to Guillotines' tavern in the Campuccio — the massive features of the athlete as they varied under feelings of astonishment and devotion, his vigil in the grim guest's room, waiting for darkness to fall, while above his head he felt the rugged chin of his anxious host, who, with a jerk of his shoulders, declared himself ready, in order to protect the leader, to call up all his forces, and was silently awaiting Guerra's definite orders. Snarling like a great dog, he had already cleared everybody out of the room with a brutal word. Then the journey through the streets, in the darkness of the night, with terror in his heart, over bridges, down more streets, the shadowy forms of his fellows, each of which was an enemy — the old house in the Via della Nave, like a crooked tooth in front of the gorge of hell; his journey through the cellars in the black, sweltering and mournful air of the tomb, which was comforting, because

it contained no other people, but also horrible for the self-same reason. But what did all this, and the plush comfort of the room he was in signify, when he closed his eyes and saw the hell into which he had fallen?

Checca was standing in the room, God alone knew how long she had been there. Possibly he had left the door open, or had failed to hear her knock. Perhaps this old woman, who had cried out when he had thought of the terrible deed awaiting him, was the creature who stood closest to him, most intimately bound to him, and omniscient through her love. But that served no useful purpose now; for would he not have had her summoned if she had not come of her own accord? He nodded to her by way of greeting.

" If you please, Signore," she said with bated breath, " Gioia can come to you now."

Guerra did not say either yes or no. He merely repeated the gesture he had made with his hand when he had greeted her. In the end he explained, by way of excuse, that he was tired, as he had imprudently gone into the town to see his sister, and that the Abate Vacca had been standing in front of the Palazzo Corleone and seen him leave it. Even though he need not necessarily have recognised him, his clothes and the place where he was seen could point only to one or two conclusions. Guerra's irony was a little bit helpless and shallow and he constantly waved his hand in the air with an agonised gesture. Checca stood with bowed head and said nothing. He felt he must have a word with Madda, he said, madly continuing his tale, in an undertone as if he were talking to himself, not for this reason or that, but because he felt compelled, compelled, compelled . . . His voice died away, still repeating the word. Checca did not move, but merely shrugged her narrow, bony shoulders. Guerra lifted his feet on to the sofa as if there were a rat in the room.

" Hell is where I am now," he muttered, " but I cannot kill, Checca . . ." Then he looked at her for the first time, and at the same moment she raised her head. He pulled a grimace

which made his face look strangely hideous. "I am now . . ." he muttered, letting his lower lip hang, "I am now going to hawk death about — yes, and the child Madda will perhaps take it from me. Just think a moment, Checca, of such a transaction!"

"I have already thought about it," Checca replied softly, not taking her eyes off him.

"Think of it!" he cried wildly. "Think of it! It is not so simple as all that, and no one can make up his mind about it all at once. And I did not say yes to Madda — for you are still here . . ."

Checca remained quite still; even her eyelids did not quiver. She answered him unhesitatingly, and in matter-of-fact tones, as if her reply had been prepared.

"I am ready, of course. It is no doubt a matter of an attempt on the life of the sovereign."

"Ready, of course, of course . . ." he repeated with a desperate expression on his face, "but I am very far from having said yes, go and do it! — do you understand? These may possibly be no more than enquiries, tests . . ." He suddenly sat up and put his feet to the floor. Then he said sternly, "This sacrifice to honour, Checca, whom are you doing it for — your father or the Party?"

Checca's face was flecked with red and her shoulders twitched. Then in hollow tones she replied:

"You — Gasto . . ."

It was strange that at precisely this moment she should have taken the unprecedented liberty of using the intimate form of his Christian name. Perhaps it was due to a deep feminine intuition, that such a sign of tenderness revealed as it were by accident through the momentousness of the occasion, would not even be noticed as anything odd or unusual, and would be confirmed in the gentlest way by being accepted as perfectly natural.

Guerra took no notice of it.

"Very well," he said hastily, "very well, Checca *mia,* and

now go and bring the old man to me. This day must have an end."

Checca left without a word of reply. For a few minutes time went by emptily in the room. Guerra stared at the shining lights in the chandelier.

There was a knock at the door, which opened slowly and Gioia, blinking and mumbling to himself, put his humble head into the room. Then he shuffled his body in and ceremoniously closed the door behind him. He remained standing against the wall, swaying up and down, and greeted his leader for the third time. His face was pale as a corpse, dull grey like his beard, in which his features seemed to be dissolving. Guerra looked at him for a long time. Suddenly, as if he had all at once come to his senses, he held out a hand to him, and called him Signor Gioia. The old man lurched forward from the wall, and chuckling softly with confusion, carefully laid his begging hand in that of his leader.

"So you can use this hand?" the great Guerra asked in friendly tones. Gioia, slightly petrified, glanced at him out of the corners of his eyes, as if he were looking from behind his glasses. Guerra smiled at him. The dread leader's condescension was comforting. But there was certainly something behind it. The old man resolved to answer the question only by a dubious nod of his head. Guerra might have continued to say all kinds of agreeable things which would have drawn him out and led to more. But suddenly he found he could not proceed; possibly he had been irritated by Gioia's caution; possibly, too, his nervous energy was exhausted.

"Yes or no?" he demanded. "Can you shoot with your left hand?"

The old man pulled himself together and swayed slowly back to the wall. The begging hand was waved from side to side, as a proof of its extreme feebleness.

"Your Grace . . ." he stammered, "*Dio* . . ."

Guerra took a piece of paper from his pocket.

"On the 15th of August, 1807, and on the 13th of November,

1809," he said, "on behalf of the Party you shot two delinquents. As your right hand has been crippled since the year 1804, you must have fired at them with the left."

Gioia was now standing in the furthest corner of the room. For some reason or other he had removed his glasses, possibly in order to provoke pity. His poor eyes turned from side to side, and his jaw followed their movements rhythmically. Guerra put his fists to his eyes. Suddenly he said:

"Don't stand there like that! Do you think anyone can stand it?"

Gioia covered his face with his left hand, possibly to hide some tears, or to conceal his eyes and lower jaw, which no longer seemed to obey his will. Guerra coughed irritably.

"Yes," he said hoarsely, speaking rapidly, as if he were meeting objections, "at five yards you could hit your mark even today. You will carry the pistol wrapped up in a newspaper. I do not know yet whether I shall post you on the Piazza di Santa Croce on Carnival Sunday, just as the procession is passing, or at the 'Passaggio' under the Uffizi, or at one of the gala performances in the Pergola by the entrance. It will depend on circumstances. In any case your position will be such that the sovereign will pass quite close by you."

Meanwhile Gioia had let his hand fall from his face, and raised his watery eyes. He stared so intently at the leader that Guerra's brow grew bright with sweat. The old man pulled himself up and forward, and then lurched almost menacingly towards his companion. Guerra retreated a step.

"What do you want?" he asked gently, and put a hand in his pocket. Gioia came close up to him, his neck craned like a reptile. Then, mysteriously, like a sibyl, he muttered:

"I will see, your Grace — I will see — whether you are so bad — or mad — I can see enough for that . . ."

Guerra stood still, as it were, appeased. His eyes alone betrayed his emotion. They were wide open, not with horror, but fixed as though they had seen, or his ears had heard, some-

thing unexpectedly pleasing. He took a dainty little pocket pistol from his pocket and handed it to the old man.

"Let us just see, Signor Gioia," he said light-heartedly, "whether you know your way about with that pistol. It is loaded."

Gioia leant his head more than ever to one side, seized the weapon, and muttered something to himself. Then resting the barrel against his right arm, he cocked the pistol with a sure hand. Guerra stood in front of him, his legs apart, the upper part of his body thrown slightly back.

"Now, Signor Gioia . . ." he said very softly, as if he were trying not to disturb someone asleep, "now—quickly, quickly!—it is the best thing to do . . ."

He closed his eyes, nervously clenched and unclenched his hands outstretched on either side, and then opened his eyes. Gioia with his face in shadow was holding the weapon in the palm of his hand as if he were trying to determine its weight.

"Why don't you shoot?" Guerra implored. Gioia winked at him, almost cheerfully.

"Poor man!" he said softly, and seizing the butt end of the pistol, he turned the weapon on himself.

"Brother!" cried Guerra, and dashing towards him he wrenched the pistol from him and flung it on to the sofa, begging pardon confusedly of him, of Madda, of Checca and stroking Gioia's begging hand again and again. Gioia giggled in embarrassment.

THE REBELS

I

It was the subtle irony of fate that the ill-omened little supper in the Palazzo Corleone should take place on February the 2nd, on the evening of the day on which the Conclave in Rome at last came to an end, and gave the palm of victory, as had been expected, to the party of the orthodox and reactionary Cardinals, the *Zelanti*. The *Buon Governo,* no less than the rebels, had been awaiting this day, for the authorities who, through Caminer, were associated in some obscure manner with the double-faced Duke of Modena, were thoroughly well aware of the alarming nature of the occasion. And both sides were staking upon the success of the reactionaries within the Papal States — the one for their attack, and the other, to uphold, with the help of Austria, their object of safeguarding the State.

When, on that evening, the Princess' little group of guests was collected in the red drawing-room on the first floor of the palace, the election as Pope of the General of the Camaldolensians and Ultramontane canonical writer was not yet known in Florence, although Caminer, who was the last to arrive, and without further ado, excused himself on the score of pressing business, was expecting an express messenger to arrive with the news at any moment, while for days he had held another in readiness to bear instructions to Modena.

Maria Corleone had told the Baronissimo that she doubted whether the Chief of Police would accept her invitation. But with gentle emphasis, the old man had assured her that he would come. For was it not obviously in his interest to meet

the beautiful girl in a manner at once so congenial and inconspicuous?

The Princess' face, which had grown thinner, looked strained and anxious.

"Whose purpose are we really serving, *amico?*" she enquired, making an effort to smile.

"The purpose of our poor souls," he replied enigmatically.

Prince George raised the most determined objections to Caminer's visit, and the Princess, puzzled by her husband's opposition, haughtily advised him to solve the problem, as far as he himself was concerned, by spending the evening at his club. George declined, and proffered the extraordinary reason that, as a person who was ex-territorial, his presence might in certain circumstances prove of use. The Princess laughed.

"I am ex-territorial, too," she said, "and so is my house. But apart from that, it seems to me that our prerogatives have precious little to do with the Chief of Police, whom it may be desirable for me to receive from a political point of view." Then, looking down at her hands, she added with some embarrassment, "You do not even know, George, whether I am not fulfilling one of the sovereign's wishes in this matter."

Prince George gazed at her for some time, and then gently shook his bald head. But as for some obscure reason he did not feel inclined to continue the conversation, he quickly found a pretext to leave the house. But to Steiner he observed:

"The fact that my wife's political interests do not please me, you already know. But as to this Chief of Police, who is to sit at her table, I take the liberty of pointing out that it is just as disreputable to hand him over a victim as it is to cajole his prey out of his jaws."

"But who told you," Steiner enquired, "that there is any likelihood of the one or the other?"

"My eyes and my intelligence," the Prince replied, "even though the functioning of both may be below the average. But

that would only be an argument in favour of the obviousness of the proceeding."

"Well?" Steiner enquired gravely. George raised a finger and spoke with great emphasis.

"Well, it is not impossible that, in order to protect the young lady who is under suspicion, I might assert my legal rights, and my rights as master of the house!"

"Certainly!" his companion agreed with some warmth. "And how much more natural it would be for you to do so in order to protect the Princess herself!"

George looked at him aghast.

"Have things really gone as far as that?" he murmured, "... as bad as that ... well, well!"

Truth to tell, Caminer accepted the invitation with almost indecent alacrity. Of late he had hardly left his office for a moment. He had even spent most of his nights there, incessantly at work, and withal so happy, that no sign of that pallor which comes of want of fresh air appeared on his ruddy complexion. The invitation to the Palazzo Corleone seemed to fit in most admirably with his investigations which were now almost complete. Nor was the invitation itself much of a puzzle to him; for from the pitiless prominence of his official position, he had already had opportunity enough to observe the marvellous swimming powers of those whose heads were about to go under. It needed but one or two more strokes, and a signal from the north and the south, and a mechanism would be set in motion, in connection with which he felt but one regret — that it should come into play in such an insignificant and neglected corner of European history. His colleague, Don Vacca, who, thanks to the control he had undoubtedly exercised over his personal inclinations, and particularly on account of a recent report connected with the Palazzo Corleone, now stood in high favour, never saw his chief except with features beaming with joy, as it were full of the inspired confidence which fills a poet just before the completion of his work. Lionello rubbed his hands gleefully, less out of friendly sympathy than from satisfaction at his own shrewdness, which

had enabled him to make the right choice at the right moment.

"Only a day or two more, *Reverendo,*" the Chief of Police gurgled into his fiery beard, "and I can open my private offensive against the great man. In any case, I shall pull down quite a number of pillars in his emotional edifice — which — he he! . . . by the bye, is rather a curious metaphor."

Don Lionello felt the faint uneasiness which always overcame him whenever his Chief turned the light upon himself.

"But, Cavaliere," he said, with a broad grin that indicated he was about to crack a joke, "I thought until now that you were on a war footing towards the revolutionary party . . ."

"*Per Bacco,*" replied his lighthearted companion with a laugh, "not so bad either, methinks! But," he added softly, and the fire from his skin and beard set his eyes aflame, "but a man has his little pleasures, apart from his profession — ha, ha! Vacca, to whom do I say this? In your case, it is women — in my case . . . ha, ha! Oh, by the bye," he added, suddenly changing the subject, and recovering his usual calm and friendly tone, "the Ghetto can, as the Town Commandant assures me, without prejudicing the safety of other quarters of the town, be surrounded in such a manner that, even in the probable event of subterranean communications being in existence, all the adjoining streets will be blockaded. And then the patriots will have to do a little preliminary shooting — it is even important that they should — ha, ha!"

And relapsing into sinister laughter, he nodded to the Abate and retired to an adjoining room to dress for the supper-party. Don Lionello waited until he had gone and the door was closed. Then, with his eyes timidly fixed on the wall, on the other side of which the Chief of Police was singing cheerfully, though extremely flat, Vacca dared to cross himself.

Before del Monte, the Prime Minister, answered Maria Corleone's invitation, he asked old Steiner to call upon him, and without saying a word, handed him the Princess' invitation card, with the pretentious crown at the top. The Baronissimo glanced carelessly at it and said with a smile:

"For various reasons, your Excellency, it is you who will

have to take the Princess in to dinner, if the other lady — there will only be the two — takes Cavaliere Caminer's arm."

"Caminer?" exclaimed the Minister, aghast. Steiner nodded.

"He accepted the invitation post haste," he replied. "If only on account of his official and, in view of his conspicuous redness, let us say, his symbolical capacity to be the spark that will explode the powder-barrel, the presence of your highly honoured person is most necessary, Marchese."

"In God's name, Steiner," said del Monte, shaking his head, "do you not know how terribly near we happen to be to the explosion?"

"According to my own private calculations," replied the old man, unmoved, "and as far as I am in a position to judge the situation, from the news I obtain from friends in Rome, it is from twelve to forty-eight hours ahead. And in the interest of the life, which is my particular concern, I say the sooner the better! And you must long have been aware, your Excellency, that this interest must be strangely akin to the interest of the State. At bottom, therefore, we are genuine allies — that is to say, I can see no other solution except a lightning victory on the part of the State.

Del Monte shrugged his shoulders.

"It is the nature of explosives," he murmured, "to do damage indifferently on all sides. And in this respect also the Chief of Police seems to me to be worthy of your simile."

"We have already, on a previous occasion, acknowledged our impotence to each other, your Excellency," said Steiner, with a smile. "We possess nothing except our love — and with us old people, that is always a passive attitude. What is there left for us to do then, since we know that we cannot extinguish any fire?"

"But we must be on the spot!" del Monte concluded.

* * * * *

The little company, which Caminer had not yet joined, sat strangely lost in the lofty badly lighted room, the red brocade

splendour of which, for some reason, seemed to depress their spirits. The calmest among them was Maria Corleone. Armed with that calculated ceremoniousness which leaves backgrounds cleverly veiled, encased in her social bearing as in an impenetrable coat of mail, she smiled with condescending courtesy even on old Steiner, who remained attentive and decorative in the background. Least self-assured of them all was Madda. She sat pale and silent, her fingers nervously twitching, in an armchair, the great back of which spread itself importunately behind her beauty like a peacock's tail, and made her look smaller than she actually was. Del Monte was listening dutifully to Prince George, whose voice was the only one to be heard, and who with sullen garrulity was discussing the gambling debts, now well known all over the town, of a certain Florentine aristocrat, allowing his sad eyes to wander uneasily and suspiciously over the company. Nobody, not even del Monte, encouraged him by a question or any sign of interest. Suddenly he stopped, and pressed his long thin fingers together. For a few seconds the silence that reigned was so oppressive that the crackling of the logs in the chimney-piece echoed uncannily, and even the Princess did not dare to look at any of her guests. At last old Steiner emerged from the shade.

"There is no need yet, ladies and gentlemen, why we should all be so much on our guard with one another. We are still a family party."

All heads were turned towards the speaker, whose white shirt front shone out from the deep red twilight in which he was standing, whilst his features remained indistinct. Madda Guerra's hands rose from the arms of her chair.

"How do you mean?" she enquired, and in her quivering voice could be heard the regret she immediately felt at having put the question. The tiny bright patch representing Steiner's hand and cuff, stirred courteously.

"Well, Contessina," he said in a piping voice, "all of us, including you yourself, constitute the faction, so to speak, of

our fair Princess, and we are now awaiting the opposition. There is no need to make a mystery of this while we are by ourselves, is there? "

Madda did not dare to reply. She dreaded this unfathomable old man more than anyone else, like an elusive element, like Nemesis itself. And he has not even got to be killed, was the thought that passed through her confused brain. The Prime Minister laughed very softly.

" Well spoken, Steiner," he observed, and turned to the Princess. " I offer myself as an ensign to your Highness."

Maria Corleone, who was now very grave, bent forward and touched del Monte's hand.

" I don't know," she said with emotion, " whether the flag would be worthy of such a bearer! "

Once more there was silence. Then Prince George suddenly stood up and tottered weak-kneed over to his wife. She looked up at him in astonishment.

" Madam," he said, gesticulating wildly, " there are certain cases in which one enjoys confidences, without actually having been taken into anyone's confidence. You have reserved this peculiar position for me, Maria. So it would give me great pleasure if you were to say yes."

The Princess gave him her hand.

" Yes, George," she said, slightly embarrassed, " but what is the point of such confidences now? "

" *Altezza,*" came Steiner's voice, " be thankful for our confidences! "

Whereupon Caminer arrived. As the rubicund creature entered, and the glass drops of the great crystal lustre which had not been lighted, rang, as if frightened by the vibrations set up by his heavy tread, Madda was immediately conscious of her body's cowardice and inability to obey her will. The tenseness of anticipation melted away, and her body's will was shattered into as many fragments as if it had been of glass. She heard the ring of the shaking crystals above her head, and was too much frightened to know where to look. But her eyes

wandered as if of their own accord over the back of the Chief of Police, they saw the red back of his neck above his white neckcloth, and the white corners of his collar, which stuck high up, right and left of his chin, pressing themselves into his face, and burying themselves in his beard as if in blood. Then something burned her hand; she saw his woolly hair quite close, and noticed that it was brushed towards his brow and temples; and finally she looked into his red eyes as he drew himself up. She did not even know whether she had bowed. A moment later she had to take his arm.

It was fortunate that there were numerous candles burning in the dining-room, and on the round dinner-table; it was also fortunate that the chairs stood so far apart. Madda, who sat between Caminer and Prince George, was able, in the bright light, to see how flat and plebeian were the features of the Chief of Police, who, incidentally, did not take much notice of her, but, with a modest turn of his head, was discussing indifferent topics with the Marchese. The Princess, who was seated between del Monte and Steiner, was gazing in front of her and did not even raise her head, when Madda, who longed for a kind look, tried to catch her eye. Steiner, who, as usual, ate hardly anything, whispered something to the Princess, who immediately looked towards the girl with a faint smile and nod of her head. Madda blushed in confusion, and for a moment had to struggle against the desire to show the Baronissimo her gratitude. But how did she know what the old man had in his mind? Prince George, at her side, cleared his throat, and she turned to face him. He smiled, but his long nose was shining with excitement. He pressed his hands firmly together, and squinted malevolently and aggressively at Caminer, who was picking his words with care.

"Cavaliere!" he burst out at last, quite unexpectedly, leaning back in his chair, in order to fix his eye on the Chief of Police. "How are matters progressing with the revolution?"

Caminer immediately interrupted his conversation, and turned his head slowly to the right. His eyes rested for a

moment on Madda, who kept her pale face turned straight before her, and then glided across her neck to the Pretender.

"Probably," he replied, licking his lips and moustache, "most probably it will begin tomorrow, Prince."

Everybody was silent. Del Monte raised the white line of his brows uneasily, and let them drop again. Maria Corleone glanced out of a tiny corner of her eye at Madda, who did not stir. Old Steiner, who was toying with his monocle, broke the silence.

"What a compliment your presence here this evening is, both to the Princess and to your constitution, Cavalier Pompeo!"

Caminer thrust his chin forward.

"It would also perhaps be a compliment to the *Buon Governo,* if the Revolution, which, if I may say so, is still in its swaddling clothes, proves to be worthy of all this fuss."

"Come, come, my dear friend," del Monte interjected, "all honour to your modesty, but it strikes me that you have been kept pretty busy of late by this infant in arms. Moreover, I take the liberty of feeling some surprise at the preciseness of your political prophecies."

"Your Excellency," retorted the Chief of Police with a courteous gesture, "may I be allowed to tell tales out of school?" And as befitted a considerate guest, he passed his eyes round the company. "But what does it signify, after all; for, as a matter of fact, it is not our school, but the revolutionary school. Think of it, ladies and gentlemen, the signal for the national rising is the news that the Pope has been elected, which is expected any minute!" Then he turned unexpectedly to Madda. "Not only have the authorities known this for a long while," he said with a smile, "but every ignorant restaurant waiter knows it as well. Is that not farcical, Contessina?"

The girl clenched her teeth.

"It depends on how you look at it," she replied, without turning to him. Caminer lowered his chin into his high cravat, so that the corners of his collar vanished in his red beard. It

looked as if he were trying to suppress the malicious smile on his lips out of courtesy. But he said nothing, and Maria Corleone, who was watching him, observed caustically:

" I really believe, Signor Caminer, that a perfect official like yourself, is always on duty, and remains a criminologist in all circumstances."

" Certainly, your Highness," the Chief of Police rejoined, lowering his head like a stag, " but it is the fault of mankind that people like me are rarely superfluous."

Steiner now joined in.

" You set yourself up in opposition to the rest of mankind, Cavaliere, in a most wonderful manner. It is fortunate for us, and for you as well, that we are no longer in the Middle Ages."

Throughout his term of office, the President of the *Buon Governo* had avoided making any attack on this mysterious Baron, and in this he was guided less by diplomatic scruples which prompted him to leave in peace the political agent of a world-Power in no way interested in seeing injury inflicted on the Grand Duchy, than by a purely personal and most unusual timidity towards an intellectual force, which, while it had the same range as himself, inspired fear and was his superior because the source from which it obtained its nourishment was secret and mysterious. The very fact that the old man was present on this occasion displeased him. Del Monte's presence disturbed him much less. He therefore preferred not to answer the Baronissimo. But that doddering old Pretender was singularly hostile to him today, leaving him no loophole, and attacking him on the flank.

" What has history got to do with it, my dear Steiner," he exclaimed, " in the face of such an explicit avowal? Have you any idea what criminals we appear to be from the President's point of view? "

" Possibly," said Steiner with a smile. Caminer, puzzled and irritated by the hostility about him, nevertheless thought it advisable to underline the joke.

" *Per Bacco,* Baron," he cried, with ruddy good cheer, " that's

not so bad! Unmask the Chief of Police! Your Excellency, will you please attend? We may get to hear some business of State! "

In order to calm the perturbation in his heart, the old Minister had reminded his hostess of the well-known privilege he enjoyed of being allowed to smoke between the courses. Hardly opening his eyes, he answered softly, as a whiff of smoke, thin as a hair, curled from his lips:

" Excuse me, Cavaliere, but I am not here in my capacity of Minister, and I am free from any trace of that official atavism which you claim for yourself. The fact that we are very different in nature, I have already pointed out to you on several occasions. I am merely the guest of the Princess, as we said but a moment ago, her ensign — to use a pleasant metaphor proving my old admiration of her. I can therefore listen to the Baron's conversation not as an official but only as a friend."

Caminer bit his lip so that his moustache touched his beard. A third of his face below his broad nose lay in fleshless fiery hair. He ventured to cast a prolonged almost offensive look at the Minister, and forgot all sense of humour.

" That sounds almost like a disavowal, your Excellency," he murmured. Del Monte closed his eyes altogether, and puffed the smoke from his lips in silence. The Chief of Police looked savagely round the hostile table. He felt that he was losing his *sang-froid* in the presence of such systematic, organised and aggressive enmity, and kept his fists tightly to his side, so that they should not in peasantlike fury fly on to the table, and destroy these people's castles of cards. But the perfect bearing of the Princess, who was sitting opposite to him, and the noble calm of her face, counterbalanced his rage with rage of a different kind from which he seldom suffered. When he did so, however, it stirred him to the depths. How could this woman, who at a word from him could be annihilated, and who knew his power, as well as he did himself, summon up the mad courage to be so calm, to wear that peach-coloured brocade dress so carelessly, and to expose her naked shoulders so proudly? How

had she been able to summon up courage to invite him, and to humiliate him by thus confronting him with an alliance at once social and human, reckless of her own interests, which were entirely in his power? And how was it that the formal hostility about him constantly reminded him of his lack of form, for his abysmal rage told him that all he saw was not merely the outcome of wealth, but was something that would always be alien to his brutal body, which some Levantine sailor had implanted in his wicked mother in a beer-house in the island of Giudecca. How was it that his rage prompted him to kick away the ladder whose countless rungs he had so laboriously climbed, and on which he now stood fairly high, and like a swaggering athlete exhibit muscles which the others did not possess? Whereupon the voice of old Steiner, the spy, the man who had the reputation of being a society swindler, a picture faker, the irritatingly superior, impenetrable and secretly admired personality, was heard again.

"Don't you feel curious any longer, Cavaliere?"

Caminer did not look at the speaker, but at the girl beside him. He felt that the Princess had supporters, while she was alone and unprotected. It seemed to him better, he replied sarcastically, to say no. Whereupon he turned to her with a direct question:

"Or do you once more look at it differently, Contessina?" he asked.

At this perilous moment Madda sat overcome with embarrassment, torn this way and that. For she did not understand the unanimous attack on the Chief of Police, and dared not assume that it had been undertaken on her account. When Caminer had referred to the signal for the Revolution as a joke, she had thought of her brother and of the death which he bore about with him in horror, a hypocrite against his will. Her brain began to work. She did not reply to Caminer's direct question, but merely raised her brows. But her face was flushed again. While the Prince at her side, with violent gesticulations and perspiring brow, was preparing a suitable reply

for the Chief of Police, and the Baronissimo was warming his up with a malicious smile, the conflict was interrupted by the entrance of a lackey, who handed old Steiner a note. The little old man grew grave, begged the Princess to allow him to read the news, and held his square monocle to his eye. He read without moving a muscle of his face, then folded the paper up very small, and held it in his fist. Caminer, who was observing him more keenly than anyone else, had a painful feeling that the contents of the note, which the old man caused to vanish like a conjuror, chiefly concerned him. The fact that precisely this man could by means of some concealed method of communication, smuggle himself into the future before the Chief of Police, was not calculated to strengthen his peculiar position that night. Moreover, the Princess, as if she had gained courage for the decisive encounter from the fresh knowledge her friend seemed to have gained, folded her hands carelessly under her chin and said shortly afterwards:

"I think, Cavaliere, it would be better if we calmly dropped all innuendo and display of dialectic, and spoke openly to one another. For that is the reason why I invited you here — I willingly acknowledge it. Here are my friends, in front of whom we may come to terms without reserve. For that is what it will amount to."

Madda cast an astonished glance at the Princess. Caminer became nervous and rude.

"Forgive me, your Highness," he said, "but I am not the authority who has to speak openly to you. And I doubt whether there is any authority in a position to come to terms. I am the responsible head of the Police, who are taking certain steps necessary for the security of the State, and I am not in a position to discuss them. Neither my position, nor my nature, is endowed with that capacity for separating the official from the private individual, which enables his esteemed Excellency to enjoy the pleasure of such a friendship."

Del Monte drummed his fingers softly on the table and with some heat hurriedly interposed:

"Of the other piece of good fortune — that which constitutes me your Chief, I cannot say I am proud, Caminer; for the steps in question, as you are pleased to call them, will in the most favourable circumstances stifle the Revolution and the dynasty with it."

Caminer passed a hand wildly through his bushy hair.

"But you said a moment ago, your Excellency, that you were here not as my Chief, but as a friend of the house. Let me confess to you most emphatically, therefore, that my philosophy of life allows me to see only the State, and the dynasty, as existing only within the State, and outside the boudoir."

The Minister bowed his head and was silent. Prince George enquired sharply:

"May I ask what connection your philosophy of life has with the present discussion?"

"Its connection," replied Caminer unhesitatingly, "is that the President of the *Buon Governo* does not exist for the purpose of sparing the head of the State any private disappointments."

Then suddenly he exclaimed in his rage:

"But all this is of no use to you, ladies and gentlemen!"

Old Steiner raised the hand which held the note. His gesture plunged the Chief of Police into confusion again; for in the bitter struggle he had ventured so far that he would gladly have dispensed with such organised surprises. He looked suspiciously at the Baron's little hand.

"I perceive," said Steiner in matter-of-fact tones, "that the negotiations have failed almost before they have begun. So we can spare ourselves any personal comments. Moreover, it was only a matter of avoiding an unnecessary scandal; for the Princess' person, the motives of whose political secret — if it really is one — are known to the head of the Government, stands in any case outside your official jurisdiction. Moreover, we are not concerned with the Princess this evening."

Whereupon he turned his grey eyes gravely on the girl.

Madda felt her heart leap, and had no choice but to raise her head and say simply:

"But with me, of course."

The Chief of Police noticed the sudden change of subject and probably also the readiness of the girl to sacrifice herself; for he leant towards her and said softly and almost tenderly:

"Even that is not quite correct, Signorina; for there is no longer any room for doubt."

He did not address her by her fictitious title. That was all. "Was that all?" she asked herself, and she also asked him, looking him calmly full in the face:

"Well?"

For the first time that evening, Caminer looked at her. At that moment she felt that he was neither repulsive nor terrifying; he was not even inquisitive, but merely tender. Yet his tenderness was not that of a man who was making love; this, too, she felt immediately. What she did not know, however, was that it was the indirect and impersonal tenderness of professional satisfaction, arising from the involuntary living confirmation she afforded of his professional ingenuity. The fate of them all was slipping into his hands; the excitement had merely been an empty alarm — except for Steiner and his closed hand. When the old man saw the expression on Caminer's face, he enquired:

"But why did you accept the invitation, which was sent, in the first place, through the express wish of our young guest?"

"What an inquisition!" cried Caminer with a laugh, shaking his head. Then turning to Madda, he blinked at her from beneath his ruddy brows. "Negotiations with you too, Mademoiselle? But surely I am not Don Lionello?"

Madda parted her lips revealing a narrow strip of teeth.

"Do you want to know where Guerra is?" she asked coolly. Caminer laughed more loudly than ever; she could tell him if she liked!

"In Borgunto near Fiesole," she said, "under the name of Carlo Malossi."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Caminer. "And what is your fee for this information?"

Madda was silent. Prince George, who was breathing heavily in the seat beside her, and whose bald head was as wet as if he had just run a race, cried out so that his voice rose to falsetto:

"Shoot! We shall be shooting at each other, sir — that will be the next thing!"

The Chief of Police immediately calmed down and allowed his eyes to wander from the girl over the rest of the company. Things looked menacing! But old Steiner once more raised his hands with the note inside it.

"Stop, Sire!" he cried. "You surely misunderstand the situation. The President is still on duty, and for some reason or other was amused at what the lady told him; but he had no intention of insulting her. Is that not so, Cavaliere?"

Caminer nodded and looked at the Baron's little fist.

"But you are much more interested to know what I hold in my left hand, it seems to me, than in any information the young lady can give you. Possibly, Cavaliere, you know Signor Guerra's real address better than you know the contents of this ominous note?"

"Quite true!" replied the Chief of Police, closing his eyes. Steiner unfolded the piece of paper.

"It is quite a harmless matter by the way," he continued, "merely the result of a private enquiry in which I happen to be interested." And he flattened out the note. Caminer kept his arms folded, and pressed his chin down into his collar. "If we felt very much afraid of you, Cavaliere," the old man went on, "we should feel it incumbent upon us not to let you know this news too soon; for with the outbreak of the Revolution you are supposed to begin taking your famous steps, are you not?"

"Oh, is that it?" exclaimed Caminer, springing to his feet. Steiner handed him the note across the table.

"Yes," he said with a smile, "*habemus Papam*. You can read the past and future name of the good monk yourself. And the fee I ask for this genuine piece of news is no more than what the young lady has apparently asked you for the information you seem to doubt. Whom are you prompted to arrest now?"

Caminer glanced through the telegram. He appeared not to have heard Steiner's question, for the next moment he was courteously begging the Princess to excuse him. She would readily understand that he must return to the Bargello at once; but before he went, he hoped he might be allowed to exchange a few words in private with Signorina Guerra. He said "Signorina Guerra." But no one, not even Madda, seemed to notice it.

"Of course I answer for it," he concluded, "that it will only be a short conversation and not an arrest."

Madda rose immediately and followed by Caminer, retired to the small silver-grey drawing-room near the dining-room.

"Signorina," he said, "as far as I know, Baron Steiner is not a member of the Party."

"No," she replied. He drew in his lips and rubbed his moustache against his hand. After a moment's reflection, he continued:

"We can strike a little bargain. I am pretty well acquainted with the regulations of the Party. It is quite clear that Baron Steiner has become initiated against the rules. If you will report him — you understand what the consequences would be which I have in mind for him — I shall save your brother from the court martial which will be held after the raid on the Ghetto. I have my reasons for this proposal. Do you accept?"

"Yes," replied Madda. Caminer did not stir from the door. He does not seem to have finished yet, thought Madda.

"It appears to me," the Chief of Police continued, somewhat disconsolately, "that you are the only person in this house

who objects less to my personal unattractiveness than to my calling. Possibly I am mistaken; but it would be a good move on your part to admit it; for I should be pleased to think you did not dislike me, and if you would answer an extraordinary question perfectly frankly."

"Yes," said Madda. Caminer nodded and smiled in a way that suddenly made his face look sad.

"Thank you!" he said, speaking more softly than before. "Is all you are doing prompted by love for your brother, or — shall we say — by belief in the Revolution?"

"Love for Guerra," replied Madda. Caminer nodded and smiled once more.

"I believe you," he said tenderly. "And I could give you a false passport, and send you safely across the frontier. But for the same reason, you would not accept!"

"No!" said Madda. Caminer gave a low laugh, and pressed his fists to his temples.

"Just see, just see," he muttered, "how hard God makes it for me to be as human as other people . . ."

And he left her without saying good-bye.

2

When, shortly after the Chief of Police had left the Palazzo Corleone, and while the company, with the exception of Madda, were still whispering round the dining table, Renzo stepped out into the night, the lanterns of spies were flashed in his rear.

He had left the Palace by the tradesmen's entrance, which faced a little passage, leading from the quay to the Bargo Santi Apostoli. A glance at the lanterns which were busy even in this street, showed how closely the house was being watched. Renzo knew the risks he was running, and was aware that it would serve no purpose to take roundabout ways. He traversed the short distance between the Porta Rossa and the Via della Nave unmolested, except for the accompaniment

of whistles and flashlights. In front of the crooked house, from which the underground passage started, he turned craftily round and ostentatiously came to a standstill before a café chantant, but as he had passed by he had opened the door of the house. He hoped that the lanterns had missed the right building and had not noticed him slip in, buried as he was in the shadow of the wall. When he returned a little while later — the leader having received his news with strange indifference — he could see the lanterns flashing large and eager at the end of the cellar passage. To make his way back through the underground passage was out of the question; for hardly had the idea entered his mind than other lights burst out from the niches behind him. A moment later he was arrested with but small exchange of words; he hardly felt them touch him and saw little else than a ring of lanterns round him, a few hands bearing police batons, and the muzzle of a musket, which was directed at his brow and went on in front of him — a diminutive blind eye beside the spiteful vigilant larger eye of a bull's-eye lantern. On the narrow steps which led from the cellars to the ground floor, he was obliged to lean against the wall to make room for a body of sappers who were descending into the subterranean passage.

Madda did not sleep. When three o'clock struck and Renzo had not returned, she was forced to conclude that he had been arrested. Tortured by doubts as to whether he had been able to convey the news to her brother, her uneasiness and loneliness grew deeper as the silence about her increased. She paced up and down her room even faster and faster.

At last she went to Maria Corleone, knocked very softly at her door, and received an immediate reply. She opened the door, found the room still lighted, and the Princess in her great four-poster bed reading a book. She raised her head. Her eyes had dark rings round them.

"So you cannot sleep either, my child?" she said in calm friendly tones. Madda was shocked by her composure.

"The house is apparently already surrounded," she replied

with some annoyance. " At all events Maddii has not returned from a message I sent him on."

The Princess nodded indifferently. Madda felt the blood rushing to her head and burst out aggressively.

" In case of need, Guerra will naturally try to seek safety in your house."

" Good! " the Princess replied; " but the Chief of Police will feel no scruple about having the house searched. After all, it does not matter much whether they arrest him here or in his hiding place, which seems to be known to the authorities."

Madda sat down on the edge of the bed and gazed at the recumbent figure. Her eyes were hard, and she scanned her friend's features with deliberate malevolence, to punish her for her coolness. She examined her skin, which was beginning to get flabby, and stroked it lightly with the tips of her fingers. Maria Corleone pulled the bed clothes up to her shoulders, leaving only her beautiful arms exposed.

" Is that all you fear on his account? " Madda enquired. The Princess shrugged her shoulders.

" Not much more," she replied simply. " There will not be much fighting, particularly as Guerra's arrest will be the first concern of the authorities. The sovereign is a clever man, and will follow del Monte's advice rather than the Governor's, and not make any examples. They will leave Guerra a little while in the Bargello, and then probably send him to Elba — at least that is what the Marchese thinks."

Madda bowed her head over the Princess' mouth.

" Is that great love? " she enquired. Maria looked calmly at her.

" Poor child, you understand nothing about my love," she said. Madda bowed her head still lower, kissed her and gave her a little bite on the lips, and as she did so, she whispered:

" If I could, I would lie in the Grand Duke's bed — only out of curiosity, to see if he would ring for you. I should not give a thought to politics."

Pushing her away, the Princess said:

"According to del Monte, they will take you to the Bargello as well, until the situation has cleared a little, and then they will hand you over to some Carmelite convent."

"And what about you?" Madda enquired savagely. The Princess gave a little laugh.

"I am the only one whose fate is still hanging in the balance," she replied with a wave of her hand. "In any case you are quite capable of having denounced me to the Party."

Madda was silent for a while, as if she wished to leave the Princess to her agonising doubts. But when, with an anxious movement of her head Maria revealed that the silence was hurting her, she said:

"I have done no such thing, Maria. But do you think that Guerra loves you?"

Maria Corleone moved her head on the pillows.

"No!" she replied softly. "But what a wicked woman you are. . . ."

"I am a wicked woman," Madda interposed excitedly, "because he loves you. And I try to persuade myself that it is only that, and not a lie, or a very stupid fuss about nothing, which has twice made him prevent — twice, Maria — made him prevent . . ."

"Twice!" cried the Princess, sitting up. Madda laughed.

"Stop!" she cried. "As a matter of fact that is not quite correct. He averted it only once — the second time it will be averted by Caminer, whose genius nobody will appreciate more keenly than Guerra in his mental agony. For, as far as I can see at present, he will certainly be more likely to see the Chief of Police than the sovereign — and I too. And had you been present at our interview a few days ago, he would also have begged you to relieve him of the little attempt at murder . . ."

The Princess struck her in the face. She fell from the edge of the bed and cried like a child.

* * * * *

When Maddii had left him, Guerra did not go to bed. He had Checca roused and drily informed her how desperate the situation was. Communications with the various sections might perhaps remain open a few hours longer; nevertheless, an order to attack at such short notice would, in view of the readiness of the garrison, not only mean certain failure, but also possibly jeopardise from the start the success of the movement in the neighbouring States; while, if they waited, it would mean his arrest and the collapse of the rising because it had no leader. He was silent. In the last few days he had been so taciturn and reserved that Checca had hardly been able to extract the most necessary instructions from him.

"And what are you going to do, Signore?" she asked at last. Guerra shrugged his shoulders.

"I was only a desperado for a second," he said sullenly. "You can ask Gioia. Now I am once again the little man who clings to life—to life, Checca! Strangely enough the only guarantee I have so far is—the Bargello!"

Checca gazed long and sadly at him and shook her head.

"I am not much attached to life," she said; "I have told you so already, Signore. It would be a good thing if you allowed me to do what I am ready to do."

She hesitated a moment; then she added:

"I think it is disgraceful!"

Guerra laughed softly.

"That is very carefully put, Checca; but it cannot be helped if you blush for me. Perhaps my whole life blushes for its meaning; all the same I have the feeling that it would be a pity for that life to end yet. The other half, the true half, has to be lived now. And in no case can I allow you to perform a senseless act of terrorism on my behalf; for it does not in the least matter whether I shoot or whether you do; in either case I should forfeit my better life." He raised his voice. "I refuse, do you hear me? I refuse! That man is much more valuable than I am, and much more valuable to the country than we are with our Cause, although he is a Prince and a foreigner; for

we have not got as far as that yet." He laughed. "And even if you are again convinced that my glib tongue is lying, in order to conceal my cowardice, you are not sufficiently one of the public for me to go to so much pains. What is more, you will have no opportunity of shooting."

And standing up, he pulled on his boots and picked up his hat, his coat and his pistols. Checca said wearily:

"So you are going to the Palazzo Corleone after all, as the Signorina advised? I really do not understand you any longer!"

Guerra shrugged his shoulders, replying that he would be back before dawn; it was imperative for him to speak to his sister again, because he was not sure of her.

"She, too, can spoil the future," he said with a smile, "and then . . . but that, after all, does not concern you."

"No," she said softly, "but what if they make it impossible for you to return, or arrest you on the way?"

"My God . . . !" cried Guerra, shrugging his shoulders; then suddenly he turned to face her, and said softly:

"This is certainly your concern, Checca; but it will distress you. Why speak about it?"

He nodded to her, and strode over to the door.

"Stop!" cried Checca in choking strident tones, her face flecked with red. He turned round enquiringly. "It is possible," she declared, "that the Via della Nave is already surrounded; perhaps the house is too. Possibly the underground passage had already been discovered, and Renzo has been seized on his way back. One must surely reckon with all these possibilities."

"Well, and what then?" Guerra enquired. She was still embarrassed, like a silly schoolgirl. She begged him to wait a little while. She would advance cautiously along the underground passage, and from a ground floor window in the Via della Nave reconnoitre the ground. She used technical military terms with a soft appealing smile. But Guerra did not notice it; his eyes were elsewhere deep in thought.

"That's just as it should be," she said encouragingly in her still quivering voice. "You are the leader, and I am your lieutenant. It is even in accordance with the rules."

Guerra nodded absent-mindedly; at all events he was quite ready to come, he said, and mumbled something about Madda and Maria. He would wait for her to return at the cellar door.

"That's right, that's right," said Checca, nodding, and she made for the underground passage followed by him. She cast the light on the ground in front of him with an oil lamp, so that he should not slip. For the passage, which sloped downwards, was full of pitfalls and covered with slimy moss. Squashed beetles cracked under their feet and savage centipedes reared clawing at the spreading light. But Guerra saw nothing except the ghastly little strip of passage in front of him, and the coarse dress and stockings of his guide. The steps which eventually led into the communication passage had cunning twists and turns, and were irregularly spaced. Very cautiously they descended. A door with broken glass panes marked the beginning of the communication passage. Here Guerra stopped. The woman went on and over her shoulder she whispered:

"Addio!"

"Checca!" he cried out to her, without knowing what he wanted to say. But she paid no heed to his call. The light disappeared round a bend in the passage close by. It was quite dark.

* * * * *

The sappers had been ordered to explore the communication passage to the end, but not to appear above ground on the Ghetto side. They had already advanced as far as the cellar door, and had returned, after having ascertained that there were no difficulties of access. Nevertheless, from about the middle of the tunnel to the Via della Nave, which was blockaded, they had posted sentries in niches with dark lanterns.

Checca picked her way cautiously, her ears on the alert. She

certainly smelt fumes of oil or tar, but she could not be certain that they did not come from her own lamp. Suddenly she found herself in the grip of fear, and as she uttered a faint cry, she felt there was some one close by, even before her pale light fell on him. As soon as she recognised the uniform that blocked her way, and then disappeared behind the raised light of a bull's-eye, she let her own lantern drop to the floor, seized the somewhat, antiquated pocket pistol, she had been given by the leaders of the Party many years previously, and carried in a pocket specially sewn for the purpose into her underskirt, and fired. She did not fire to kill, but only to warn the great Guerra. She took no aim, but merely pressed the trigger quickly and anxiously. But the bullet must have glanced from the stone flags of the floor, or the walls or the roof, and struck a short soldier from Arezzo who was asleep about twenty yards behind the first sentry and severed his carotid artery. Checca could hear his gurgling cries, and covered her face with her hands to avoid looking at the first sentry who was aiming at her, or perhaps to ask bitterly of God why the silly thing had happened. And then with a blaze of red her world was blotted out!

* * * * *

The sounds of the two shots rang hollow through the passage. Guerra's jaw dropped; terror laid hold on his heart. A flash of the wild redness into which Checca was at that moment sinking seemed to flit before his eyes, which wandered up and down, up and down the wall of darkness. His ears, which could hear nothing more, were the means of slowly bringing him to his senses. Whereupon the thought occurred to his mind, dinning loudly and brutally into his brain — the thought of going through the door; just a few steps, and, if need be, holding his hands above his head with a white handkerchief as a sign of truce — but get going, get going — and then everything would be over!

But his body refused, and taking charge of him, forced him

to turn round, stumble up the steps, burn his fingers on countless sulphur matches that gave a wretched light, wander through unfamiliar passages, and finally, helpless and infuriated, to shout so long for Salomone that at last a thin man in a shirt emerged from a crack in the wall, with terrified faces behind him, and silently undertook to guide the wanderer.

Salomone opened the door; he had been roused from sleep and looked very ugly, his hairy sunken chest exposed between the flapping sides of his dressing-gown. He did not even dare to ask a question.

"Tomorrow! Tomorrow!" cried Guerra, forestalling his curiosity. "Tomorrow you will know everything! And soon enough too! Now I must go to Gioia!"

Salomone swayed from side to side, beat his chest with his fists, and moved his lips. His eyelids drooped heavily, as if he were blind. Then he nodded and led the way. The room was filled with the smell of meat and reeked of old men. Gioia was lying right on the edge of the bed, on his right side, as usual; but he was not asleep. He did not expect to catch the sleep that eluded him until dawn, and was dumb with the pain in his bones. He blinked into the light that had just been brought in, but not at Guerra who carried it. Salomone had not come in, but had closed the door behind him.

Guerra placed the lamp on the table, drew a chair up to the bed, and sat down. Gioia was still looking away from him at the light. His right arm was under his body, and he was pressing his face against his crippled gouty hand trying to squeeze the pain out of it. His eyes were swimming with water. Guerra leant forward and drew quite close up to him.

"Gioia," he enquired, "you cannot sleep, can you?"

The old man cast a fleeting glance at him and answered rudely.

"What do you want to get out of me now?"

"Gioia," Guerra enquired, "have you been thinking of Checca during the last hour?"

"No," the old man replied with sudden willingness,

blinking at the light. "I have been thinking of Bonaparte — yes ——"

"Gioia," said Guerra, "Checca — you would have done better to think of Checca. . . . She went into the cellars for me — and then there were two shots."

The old man turned laboriously over on his back, and propped himself up a little. He gazed at his visitor, his eyes streaming with the effort they were making. Then he enquired hoarsely:

"Are you sorry at least?"

"Yes," replied Guerra. The old man licked his lips with his grey tongue, as if he were trying to taste something.

"You are not worth it," he said suddenly, in hard emphatic tones, "but in Toulon . . . young man . . ."

He smiled, let himself fall back on his pillow and remained silent, blinking at the light through half-closed eyes. Guerra remained seated by his bed. There was not a sound. He might have been watching beside a corpse.

3

The Grand Duke never forgot the following day, the 3rd of February — an extremely ordinary, dull and somewhat cheerless day, which hung like a grey curtain, hardly moving, in front of impending events. From his reticent and reserved manner, it would have been difficult to infer either the eagerness with which he had just planned the political campaign in close association with Caminer, or the uneasiness of his feelings in view of the trouble ahead. His Prime Minister and the Chief of Police, both of whom he mistrusted from a particular standpoint, though he asked them for no information, had, in their daily reports and conferences, dealt chiefly with matters relating to foreign affairs, and had not found it necessary to employ subterfuges in order to avoid dangerous topics. Del Monte was negotiating with the Great Powers in view of possible changes in the neighbouring States, and had in his pockets, in

case of extreme need, a promise of intervention from Austria, as also an assurance of neutrality from France. Caminer's line was more strange and concealed. He had entered into an alliance with the neurotic Duke of Modena, who, like an unscrupulous alchemist, was stewing revolution and reaction in the same retort, and who, as Caminer alone knew at that moment, was the most cynical *agent provocateur* of his day. But even the Grand Duke, whom Caminer had initiated in due course into the delicate business, felt quite at home in this subterranean policy, and was counting on the moment, which had been arranged beforehand, for the Duke of Modena personally to set light to the revolutionary fire, while holding himself in readiness to extinguish it with the forces of reaction already prepared.

He found it much more difficult to maintain that stability so necessary to him in his private life, which was ruled by the law of his attachments. In many lonely hours of silence, while the friendly and thoughtful spirit of the night streamed down upon him from the shelves of his library, he reflected on the problem he had so often turned over in his mind — what would life be to him without this woman? And he regarded the question not only from the standpoint of his private and secret life, concealed from the general view, which belonged to his love, but also from the standpoint of his position as head of the State. Little as Maria Corleone had endeavoured to influence him politically, or even to interfere in any way with the administration of his Court (perhaps it might even have been better, he thought, if she had shown a keener interest in these things), he was nevertheless well aware of the secret and salutary connection between the loving man and the passionless sovereign. His character hated change. There were moments during these nights when he wished to know nothing about his life, if it did not include this woman. To the extraordinary question whether his life had been beautiful, he answered in the affirmative only when he thought of her.

Maria Corleone did not help him to any decision for or

against her. As he never asked her a question, she had nothing to answer. But she made no effort to conceal the change in herself, nor to apologise for it. Since that conversation of some weeks ago, which had timidly crept up to her secret, and had, at her first signs of readiness to confess, fallen back on the old tender and familiar lines — after this diffident and stirring conversation, no further mention was ever made of the abyss which yawned behind their relationship. She gave him the calm and gentle attentions his spirit needed, and, as a matter of fact, stirred him, when she was either sad or absent, more by the faint signs of age, which were then becoming visible in her, than by the thoughts behind her anguished soul. At such times he would never call her by name, as if enquiring into her thoughts, but remained silent. And if she suddenly raised her head and looked alertly and suspiciously at him, he would pretend that he was more deeply lost in thought than she was. Only latterly — on the day when she had had the irritating talk with Madda — had she dared to ask a question which was not in keeping with their ordinary conversation.

"Are you really expecting disturbances in the near future, *caro mio?*"

For a moment he did not know whether to look at her or not; but as it struck him that it might appear too marked to keep his eyes glued to a book after such an unaccustomed subject had been broached, he cautiously raised his head. She remained bowed over her needlework.

"In consequence of the election of the Pope, there will probably be disturbances all over Central Italy," he replied.

"Have you any qualms?"

"Oh no!"

And that was all!

As at this moment she met with a difficulty in her canvas embroidery, she bowed her head lower than ever, and appeared soon to have forgotten the whole conversation.

On the morning of the 3rd of February, shortly after the official announcement of the Pope's election, and in the midst

of an active exchange of messages between the sovereign and his Prime Minister and Chief of Police, both of whom were overwhelmed with work, a chamberlain brought in an urgent request from Prince George Y. for an audience. This was an astonishing occurrence, contrary to all tradition, more particularly as the Pretender, as the chamberlain added with a slight shrug of his shoulders, had preferred the request himself, and was at that moment waiting in the sculpture gallery to be received. The Prince was busy checking the orders to be given to the garrison to stand by ready to march out, and was expecting telegrams from Caminer to say whether his cousin of Modena, had, according to plan, been able to order his men to shoot at the friendly leader of the insurgents; and naturally his first impulse and desire was to show the unwelcome roué the door. At first he thought it was probably only another of those foolish diplomatic steps, which the Pretender took from time to time to establish his claims to a throne, to which del Monte was generally forced to lend a patient ear. But he quickly changed his mind; for with a slight pang in the heart, certain dark thoughts about Maria Corleone and about something she had recently said to him — a quite unusual remark about her husband, occurred to his mind.

"The Prince," she had said, "seems to me to possess that remarkable courtesy, which veils discretion by a sort of pleasant shyness, and veils what is perhaps an astonishing knowledge of things by discretion."

He had no idea in what connection she had made this remark; but the uneasiness which had suddenly overcome him had roused his deepest anxieties. "It's no good," he thought, "one cannot escape what must come, however quick one is." And he ordered the Pretender to be shown in.

The symmetrical box-avenues of the Boboli Gardens, its fountains and even its statuary and rigid cypresses, seemed to shiver in the grey air outside. All the charms of earth seemed to be rejected by the sky, and looked disappointed and forlorn. The Grand Duke stepped back from the window,

as a humble voice behind him murmured his visitor's string of titles. As the Pretender entered, the first thing the Grand Duke missed — as the strange result of what his eyes had expected to see — was the tragi-comic red uniform which he was accustomed to see him wearing, with massive gold epaulettes on his slender shoulders, and a great long sword in his feeble hand. But today the Pretender wore a plain dark-coloured frock coat, and although his knees gave way beneath him at each step he took towards the writing-table, somehow he was not ridiculous. His gaunt face beneath the bald head was as grey as the inclement day, and, owing to the early morning mist, his eyelids were red. Yet the dignity of his bearing was something different from the ridiculous air of self-importance, which usually acted as a cloak to the ravages of absinthe upon him. Somewhat absent-mindedly he held out a hand to the Grand Duke, and when he had gravely and with a certain embarrassment settled himself in the chair he was offered, the sovereign had a premonition that the subject to be discussed could hardly be broached without distress both to himself and to the Prince. After a brief exchange of greetings he remained silent and waited. Prince George, lost in thought, did not seem to be conscious of the long silence. Then suddenly looking at his host, a little critically, as the latter thought, he burst out, as though they were in the middle of an animated conversation.

"As what I have to say is most important and urgent, I suppose, cousin, that I may speak quite freely?"

"Certainly!" replied the Grand Duke, leaning back in his chair. Prince George dropped his eyes once more.

"Much of what we know, your Highness, there is no need to mention," he said with gentle emphasis. "We may take it for granted. So I shall only refer to what I believe to be common knowledge, even if the matter is not altogether pleasant."

The Grand Duke raised his head, and brushed his hair nervously from his brow.

" Are you acting on behalf of anyone? " he enquired. George clasped his hands.

" No, but as duty prompts me," he replied somewhat harshly. " You know my position with regard to the Princess as well as I know hers with regard to you, your Highness. I may therefore appear but little qualified — nevertheless I am here because I hold myself responsible for her."

" Would you mind making yourself a little bit clearer, Prince? " the Grand Duke pleaded in anguish.

" Certainly! " Prince George replied hastily, " perfectly clear. Your Highness, supposing the President of the *Buon Governo* were to tell you that the Princess is connected with the revolutionaries, what would you do? "

The Grand Duke grew pale with agitation.

" That is a strange question, Prince," he observed sharply. " I should instruct my Chief of Police to prove his statement."

" And if he should prove it? " said George in a voice unnecessarily loud.

The Grand Duke was silent a moment, then he spoke with affected calm, his eyes fixed on the table before him.

" Then I should condemn this crime against the State just as severely as any other."

" I see," said the Pretender, standing up. The Grand Duke also sprang to his feet, somewhat perplexed. George rested his hands on the back of his chair, and gave a little bow. Strange to say, he was smiling.

" You do not seem to be surprised, cousin," he muttered. " You know as well as I do where indiscretion ends and compulsion begins — or shall we say fear — and where gratitude ought not to cease — or shall we say love . . ." His eyelids were quivering with embarrassment, and the little sacks under his sad eyes were twitching. " Yes," he continued with a nod, " I may still be cutting a somewhat comical figure, like a sort of clown — but you, your Highness, ought not, at this moment, to take any notice of that! "

Taken aback the Grand Duke shook his head and, looking

almost foolish, assured the Prince twice over that he noticed nothing, nothing, and proceeded to look out of the window. The mist was crowning the heads of the cypresses, and had already enveloped the slight elevation of the Belvedere in nonentity. What could the scarecrow want? Was he seeking for his old aversion in order to support himself upon it? How could he dare, how could he dare, the ridiculous creature . . . ? Outside a gardener was kneeling by a grey, dreary-looking bed; but all he did was done with certainty and confidence with a view to the coming of spring. The present moment was not important and did not demand any daring decision. And the dissipated gentleman behind him, who did not make his presence felt so much as by a breath, was not ridiculous; he was not even impudent. . . .

"What do you really want?" asked the Grand Duke aloud, though he spoke with his face to the window. "You know perfectly well that the Princess enjoys exterritorial rights, just as you do, and even if the worst came to the worst, I could have no other means at my disposal except to hand you your passports . . ."

"Excuse me!" cried George rudely, and the Grand Duke turned round as if he were frightened. "You are speaking without taking into account your individual worth, as if you were at a diplomatic conference. If it were merely a matter of the passports in some form or other, I should not be here! But there is something else! Why, it is nine years now! Must I really make myself so clear, your Highness?"

"No, no, no!" retorted the latter, and once more turned his back to him.

* * * * *

The tempo of the grey day was relentlessly maintained. The Grand Duke now knew the inner as well as the outer significance of it, and no longer had any excuse for surprise. The brief moment for which a man can keep himself at concert pitch was also brought home to him. For Prince George

suddenly failed and collapsed, with nothing to say beyond what his appeal had required. So it was an appeal after all! thought the Grand Duke. The end of the audience was abrupt, awkward, almost indecorous. The Grand Duke failed to introduce any fresh topic of conversation, for he was too busy with himself, and in the end it was only by chance that he noticed the Pretender give a stiff and silent bow. Otherwise he might have supposed that the Prince had left the room in the most extraordinary, not to say discourteous manner.

Caminer came at his appointed hour, his arrival almost looking as if he had come to relieve Prince George. The Grand Duke was possessed of great self-control and the Chief of Police, who was a practised observer, and had entered the royal study that morning with eyes more than ever on the alert, did not detect the smallest sign of his sovereign's violent internal emotion in his cold clear glance. But the latter, prejudiced by the scene that had just occurred, scented an attack, and immediately took refuge in an attitude of icy attention to business. There was nothing unusual in what the President had to report, and it was quite in keeping with the situation. The telegrams with news from Modena could not be expected before the evening, but the pre-arranged action would certainly be carried out soon enough to make it impossible for the insurrections in Central Italy to coincide with it, if the latter had actually been planned. As the danger threatening the Grand Duchy was very slight, and the garrison was ready, he proposed, as he had already proposed before, that they should wait for the insurrectionary movement to break out before they took action. It would certainly cost one or two more lives among the soldiery, but on the other hand, it would enable them to dispose of the opposition once and for all.

"An idea cannot be shot down," observed the Grand Duke. "I hardly think that I can accede to your bloody scheme. I shall reserve my decision until this evening."

Caminer bowed. The two men were looking strangely at each other. And it was only at that moment that Caminer read

anxiety in the Grand Duke's drawn features. Whether it was merely fancy, or the reflection of his own face, which was probably glowing rather fiercely under the pressure of the crisis, the Chief of Police did not know. Somewhat confused, he thrust his chin forward, and proceeded to sway from side to side on his bandy legs, barely perceptibly it is true, but with an ugly and provocative movement of impatience. The Grand Duke flushed red, as red as Caminer himself, and suddenly brought the palm of his hand so heavily down on the table that the glass balls that held his quill erect in the crystal ink-stand jumped into the air and rolled all about.

"Can't you control yourself?" he cried, but immediately checked himself as if he were ashamed of his outburst, and pulled at his whiskers. Caminer had made an obsequious movement to one side to try to catch the glass balls as they fell. But when the sovereign cried out, he pulled himself up at once, and kept very still.

"We have to reckon with the possibility," he observed, "that as the result of a chance communication I had to make to his sister yesterday, Gasto Guerra will escape the Ghetto raid just in time and will claim the protection of the exterritoriality of the Palazzo Corleone, as his sister has been doing for about two months."

One of the glass balls which happened to roll into the fingers of the Grand Duke was flung violently against the window, but he collected the remainder on the table, and put them back in their container.

"What led you to make this chance communication?" the Grand Duke enquired. Caminer transferred his weight to another leg.

"The belief," he replied, "that the Palazzo Corleone can be more easily watched than the Ghetto even in the most favourable circumstances."

"Not so bad!" commented the Grand Duke. "But what if we have Guerra seized?"

"Then the other, the radical solution, can be considered."

"Very good!" The ruler nodded, and speaking more softly, he said: "By the bye, since when has the Princess Corleone's guest been identified, Caminer?"

Before answering, the Chief of Police rapidly scrutinised his sovereign's features.

"I have been certain of it since yesterday, until then it was merely a supposition."

The Grand Duke weighed a massive seal in his hand, and looking towards the window, spoke less frankly than before.

"If you had consulted me, Cavaliere, I should have been able to convince you of it much sooner."

Caminer drew his legs together and hastily stepped forward. With a look of suspicion in his eyes and holding the seal like a weapon, the Grand Duke turned sharply round on him. Surly and bleary-eyed, the latter mumbled something.

"What are you saying?" the Grand Duke demanded roughly.

"I said that was admirable," the Chief of Police repeated.

"What?"

Caminer stood stock still and did not reply. Springing to his feet, the Grand Duke stepped close up to him.

"In spite of everything, I promote you to the rank of Commendatore," he said. The man raised his shoulders, arms and hands, one after the other, as if they were on supple hinges.

"I beg to tender my resignation, your Imperial Highness," he said softly.

"There is no reason for you to do so," replied the Grand Duke. "And I cannot believe that you seriously mean it."

* * * * *

The fact that del Monte was announced while Caminer was still standing in the Grand Duke's study, was entirely in keeping with the morning's programme, and that he was punctual to the minute, was only to be expected of him. The Grand Duke alone was conscious of something extraordinary in the order of the day. But he was already familiar with the

extraordinary, and had, in accordance with his nature, reached a position to which he intended to adhere and from which he could be seen.

When the Minister entered, Caminer was already standing on his sturdy legs, looking modestly assured and eager. "I wonder whether for one moment he really did take leave of his senses and admire me?" mused the sovereign, as he sat attentively at the writing-table in the background. Del Monte sniffed the air. He was unusually grave and looked very old; his skin was sallow in the grey light that poured in from the window, and which only the Chief of Police could stand. The conversation was clear and collected, as at a court martial. Del Monte gave his report on the most important items of foreign politics, referring to the armed intervention of Austria in the event of the complete or partial success of the revolts, which would probably be confined to that most decrepit and revolutionary body, the Papal States. The Cabinet of Vienna, which was very much on the alert, had given an assurance that the hostility of France, which apart from her neutral attitude towards Tuscany threatened to regard any Austrian intervention on behalf of other States as a *casus belli,* was to be disregarded in the events of any danger threatening Lombardy and Venetia. "As may very well happen," the Prince added with a laugh. He then turned the discussion on to the subject of the Tuscan insurrection. Del Monte resolutely opposed Caminer's plan of provoking the outbreak by delaying counter-measures. Quite apart from the morality of such a proceeding, it was dangerous, because the possible success of the revolutionary movement in the neighbouring countries might seriously strengthen the radical forces, or at all events exercise great influence as propaganda. The Grand Duke nodded. Without raising any real objection, Caminer observed:

"You will remember, your Excellency, that the signal was known to the revolutionary party at the same moment it was known to both of us, that is to say, yesterday evening at Princess Corleone's house, through the communication received by

Steiner. As I do not know the instructions of the Central Bureau, and am not aware whether it is proceeding to a simultaneous offensive in all the States, the local insurrection is just as likely to begin today as it is in three days' time. I cannot therefore guarantee that there will be no fighting, your Highness, even if we begin today."

The Grand Duke had not once looked at del Monte whose eyebrows were twitching. He now moved his outstretched finger from side to side, as was his habit when he was a little bit angry, and interrupted with clenched jaws.

"I have had enough of your sophistry, my friend. A little while ago, when you were giving me information about Modena, you said more or less the reverse—and it also sounded more probable. Moreover, I already know your technique. You only put it into those words just now in order to embarrass the Marchese. But after our conversation, you might have spared yourself the pains. If I knew what happened at the Princess' table, my Minister would, of course, know it also. And if, as you assume, I have lied, I likewise naturally cover the Marchese. So what does it all mean?"

Incredible as it may seem, Caminer grinned. His lips were only parted for a moment, for one wild, rebellious moment, as disrespectful as it was obvious, like the times that were to come or were already at hand, thought both the Duke and del Monte. And though they looked aghast, they were at a loss for anything to say when the lips closed again.

Caminer pressed his chin resignedly into his collar. Another little anomaly of the same sort, he declared, had just occurred to him; and, regardless of the Grand Duke's objection, he proceeded quite unabashed to report that during the night, a messenger had been sent either by the Signorina or the Princess, into the Ghetto, through whom the communication tunnel, for which they had long been seeking, between the Via della Nave and the Cortacce, had been discovered. Moreover, an old woman, who, he believed, was Guerra's personal lieutenant, had shot a man in the cellars and had been shot dead herself

directly afterwards. In short, it was now almost impossible for Guerra to leave the Ghetto, besides which full justification for the proclamation of martial law was already to hand.

The Grand Duke and del Monte still remained silent. But in a moment they were alone. Neither of them had observed how the Chief of Police had managed to disappear without another long speech. For during the last few minutes there had been hardly a sound. The Grand Duke sat with folded arms in his high-backed chair, and looked out of the window with pursed lips. Then del Monte stepped up to his writing-table. The Prince turned his head and looked at him.

"Marchese," he said, "the Chief of Police tendered his resignation just now, and I refused to accept it. If you tender yours at Easter, I shall accept it. That is certainly ungrateful of me; for you are the very opposite of a revolutionary, that is to say, you are my friend. But today I feel in need of compensation so to speak."

Del Monte was now smiling with an expression of gentle wisdom on his face, at last relieved from the long tension, as from an illness.

"That is the best solution, *Altezza,*" he said with a nod. "Moreover, it is your only chance of making good our defeat of a moment ago, in the eyes of that grinning creature, or at least in your own eyes. For your humanity is really much less in danger than the Cause which you represent, and which I have served. I must give you yet another proof of it."

The Grand Duke looked at him with great friendliness.

"At the end of our long and intimate connection, you still hide all sorts of secrets from me, dear friend, and all for the sake of my supposed well-being. But I confess to you — as we are now making a clean slate of everything — that I suspected most of it, though I was too cowardly to be convinced. I am much less humane than cowardly. At my age one already begins to attach value to certain comforting beliefs. But now say what you have to say."

"I still have to tell you, your Highness," del Monte re-

joined, " that it was the Princess who, through Baron Steiner, prevailed upon the representative of a great northern Power in Venice to warn you about the land route and the attempt on your life."

The sovereign sat silent for a few seconds and did not stir. Then he said softly:

" That is a fine trump of yours; and a fine proof too! You don't even need to tell me the moral of it, *amico.*"

4

When dusk had fallen, heliographic messages from Modena announced that the Duke had fired two cannon shots and destroyed the headquarters of the revolutionaries who had been united until then, and forced them to unconditional surrender, but from Bologna, a few hours later, came the most alarming echo of this bombardment: there had been a demonstration of armed students in front of the Palace of the Papal representative, and negotiations had been opened between the prolegate prelate and the Bolognese patriots with a view to forming a provisional government.

The Grand Duke thereupon gave the signal of alarm to the garrison, fixing the opening of operations — the occupation of all important thoroughfares, places, and bridges, and the raid on the Ghetto, for ten o'clock that evening, with instructions to fire, only if very hard pressed. An order written in his own hand, for the President of the *Buon Governo,* who was to lead the action against the Ghetto in person, laid stress on the competence of the ordinary courts to deal with every case, including that of Guerra; it also held the Chief of Police responsible for the person of the radical leader, and stated that the sovereign himself proposed to conduct the first examination of the prisoner. The Grand Duke specified both the place and the hour for this confrontation, which so much astonished the Chief of Police that he rubbed his eyes, read the order a second time, and addressing fat Vacca, who was with him and had

been entrusted with special duties on the Ponte Santa Trinità, remarked with great solemnity:

"The great Lord seems to be preparing a wonderful last act to his drama! He seems to be in love with his little piece! Moreover, he has at least as much courage as I have, and I very much doubt whether I have impressed him as much as he has impressed me. There are certain occasions when even the enjoyment of our gloomy pleasures is taken from us, is that not so? *Reverendo, pray try* to disguise your bulk, so that you may see more than see you."

Del Monte, the Prime Minister, was also surprised by a personal note from the Grand Duke, bidding him wait in a closed carriage at the main guard-station of the *Guardia nobile* in the Via Giucciardini at about ten o'clock. But the old man had no familiar spirit, to whom he could comment on the peculiarities of the sovereign, and as moreover he was by nature not very communicative, he kept his astonishment to himself. The Government Palace, which usually reflected his mood, was too tired and too depleted at that hour of the night to react. The few Secretaries who were on duty for the night, or who were awaiting the arrival of couriers, found their Chief, who was smoking, lost in thought, good-tempered rather than the reverse, although possibly his absent-mindedness only proved that he was getting old.

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The gates of the Ghetto, the guards of which had not only been strengthened, but had also been keeping the strictest watch ever since the morning, were closed at nine o'clock, and all the inmates were ordered by means of town-criers and printed notices, to close their shops and not to leave their houses. As there was nothing unusual in a raid on the Ghetto for the purpose of arresting a murderer who was suspected of having taken refuge there, and as, on the following day, there was little to show that on the previous night there had been the tramp of soldiers in the streets, flashes from torches and bull's-

eye lanterns, and shots and cries, the measures taken caused little excitement. The long-suffering people crouched silently in their noisome hovels, the thousand and one sounds of life — yes, life, even in that inferno — died down sooner than usual; a pale moon glowed milkily through gauzy clouds and in the gaps between the houses the night hung heavy, black and lonely. When the bronze bell of the Duomo chimed the hour of ten, and as the little church, quite close to the Ghetto, on the Piazza Santo Andrea, joined in, finishing much sooner, there marched through the postern-gates of the three entrances to the old and the new Ghetto, two companies of Grenadiers. They occupied the two squares, and patrolled all the streets and corners of the place. A large force blockaded the exits from the Cortacce.

Guerra shaved himself, removing his beard, which did not suit him. Then he changed his clothes, and put on one of his smartest civilian suits, which Checca had only recently brought to him from Borgunto. It consisted of a dove-grey coat, a dull yellow silk waistcoat and nankeen trousers, kept tight down the leg with trouser-straps. With folded arms he contemplated himself in the mirror, and smiled, not without irony; for he was not a dishonest man. He remembered the evening ten years previously, when, in a box at the Teatro Reale in Turin, he had acted the first scene of the Revolution — an unsuccessful one, of course — and of how in the dainty ante-chamber to the box, he had on that occasion also stood in front of the mirror, and had even practised one or two attractive gestures, which he had satisfied himself at home were among the most successful in a large range of emotion-creating movements. But he proceeded to no such rehearsal now, perhaps because he, or rather the situation, had changed.

As Salomone's rooms were in the front of his crazy house, Guerra could hear the march of the troops. Immediately oblivious of his image in the mirror, pale, and his heart beating fast, he cautiously went up to the side of the window. But all he could see was the fitful glow of torches or bull's-eye lanterns,

for he would have had to lean out to watch what was taking place in the narrow alley below. He refrained from doing so, in order to avoid attracting shots. Nevertheless, he was somewhat surprised by the sudden silence below; for the torches were still glowing. Were they not going to enter the house? He stood by the window, his face buried in a strip of silk curtain that smelt of dust.

He could not hear the sappers and spies breaking through from the communication tunnel into the cellars of the Cortacce. Then suddenly a terrible uproar arose from downstairs, like the noise that might deliberately be made to rise from a trap-door in a theatre, growing louder and louder, until it culminated in a single cry:

"Padrone!"

The cry was followed by a crowd of people, and a clanking sound accompanied their footsteps — there were soldiers among them. A quiet, almost friendly voice enquired:

"Where is the Padrone?"

A frightened Jewish voice — probably belonging to one of the tenants in the basement, where the invaders had entered first, and who had undertaken to lead them to the landlord — said softly, "Here!" and Salomone's voice repeated loudly from a room close by:

"Here is the Padrone. What do you want?"

"Are you sheltering Signor Gasto Guerra?"

"No!"

"That is a brave but senseless reply," thought Guerra. "It is time for me to make my appearance." But his body refused. He could not tear himself away from the curtain.

"Will you allow me to search the rooms?" asked the courteous voice of the man in command, "and pray have the extreme goodness to remain at my side . . ."

Then came a knock at the door which sounded as though it were made by something harder than human knuckles. "That is the butt end of a pistol," thought Guerra, and in low tones he replied, "Come in!" The door opened, and a man in top

boots, a black frock coat and a high hat, red-bearded and ruddy, with a pistol in his hand, stepped in. Over his shoulder peered Salomone's drawn face. Guerra started. Calmly and with broad-shouldered dignity, his fine head thrown back, he stepped into the centre of the room.

"Signor Gasto Guerra, I believe?" Caminer enquired. Guerra gave a silent bow. Did the Padrone not know his real name?

"Of course not!" replied Guerra chivalrously. The Chief of Police smiled and was almost affable.

"I regret to be compelled," he said, discreetly unfolding the warrant for arrest over his weapon, "to deprive you of your liberty for the sake of the safety of the State. May I request you to hold up your hands?"

Guerra raised his hands with a certain grace. In response to an order which Caminer gave over his shoulder, a *Capo agente* searched him for arms. He found nothing. Caminer asked the prisoner whether he was prepared to follow him. He said it would spare him the distress of having to handcuff him. Guerra replied that he was ready.

The *Capo agente,* followed by three of his men, found in the room behind the butcher's shop an old man in bed, with a timid expression on his face, muttering softly and happily to himself. Like a dutiful official he reported the discovery to the Chief of Police who, with Guerra and Salomone, was engaged in making his way out into the street.

"Who is he?" Caminer asked the rebel leader.

"A lunatic," replied Guerra, "quite harmless."

The President of the *Buon Governo* smiled once more, asked to be excused a moment and followed the *Capo agente* back into the room, where he turned his light on to the cheerful vacant face in the bed.

"The old man!" he exclaimed with a nod. "Gioia, Joy! He has seen his best days. He has been most useful to us. Let the poor devil lie there!"

* * * * *

The three sitting at the round table — Princess Corleone, Prince George, and Steiner — were silent. The meal was over, but they did not move to go to another room. They were all feeling a little bit weary. Moreover, the way they spanned the round table seemed to be both right and proper. Prince George, who had been admitted as if by accident into the intimate company, had not been able to resist making good the excitement of the morning with absinthe. That had taken place in the afternoon. Now he was grey and mellow. His brain was not tired, but very much on the alert, behind a pleasant diaphanous screen of vapour. His sad eyes never left the Princess' face, but from time to time what looked like a thin film formed over the iris. He made an effort to hide the shaking of his hands.

After the scene in Maria Corleone's bedroom the night before, Madda had spent the whole day in her room, vanquished, tearful, and febrile, but reproaching or menacing no one. Maria had been thinking a good deal about her. The girl's tears had hurt her. She had regretted the blow at once, and had murmured words of apology and comfort, to which the girl had replied with a faint smile and a childish nod of her head. Madda had also kissed her, but softly and without any tricks with her teeth. The Princess was thinking of all this, as she observed:

" She has only sent me a letter to forward for her."

" Who? " Steiner enquired. Prince George jerked his neck out of his tight cravat, as if he had been disturbed.

" Why, the child," replied the Princess, " and as my letters are probably censored, will you be so kind as to forward it yourself, Steiner? "

And she took a small thin envelope from her sleeve and handed it to the old man, who proceeded to read the address.

" Turin? " he remarked, " the place is teeming with radical agents. I presume it is a communication to the Central Bureau."

" I think so too," the Princess agreed. " It is probably the last possible day for correspondence to get through, and it is not

unlikely that the letter is a report about the latest developments."

Steiner swayed his head thoughtfully.

"It may be about you, Maria, or about me."

"It has nothing to do with me," said the Princess, "she did not lie when she assured me this was so. I know her too well. And you, why you?"

"Very well," said Steiner, smiling fitfully. "I'll take charge of the letter."

As he put it into his coat pocket, she asked him to give it back to her. No one could really tell what the desperate girl was capable of; she said she wished to return it to her. Steiner playfully declined. As they were pretending to quarrel over it, they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs as the dragoons took up their position on the Ponte Santa Trinità. They immediately grew silent. George rose laboriously, and rolled over to the window. He must see what was happening, he mumbled indistinctly. The grotesque helmets of the soldiers gleamed with copper lights. Some of the horses were restive and showers of sparks fell from the torches. The naked swords sent slender shafts of light heavenwards. Fusiliers were marching up the Via Tornabuoni. Faint words of command were heard. Muskets rattled on the paving stones. Gradually the body of men became motionless. Even the horses and the torches were still.

"I must just see . . ." George mumbled again at the window, and then he turned round. "It seems to me that after all they are not coming to this house, Steiner, they are respecting my sovereign rights, you see!"

"Excellent, Sire," said the old man, "but as one cannot tell yet what the next few hours may bring, I really think it would be a good thing if you told Madam where you were this morning — just as you told me. And you know well enough that I admire the step you took."

"Oh, that!" muttered George in disconsolate tones, and made his way back to his place. Princess Corleone looked up

anxiously. The Pretender stopped half way to the table, supported himself on the tall back of a chair, and looked tenderly and sadly at his friend.

"I cannot quite understand, my dear Steiner," he whined, "how you can, in that off-hand manner, suddenly mention what was a private and confidential piece of information — do you follow me?"

"This hardly seems a favourable moment for such scruples of discretion, my dear friend," the Princess interjected. George jerked his neck out of his collar.

"Why?" Steiner enquired, "don't you wish to spare the Princess the distress of having to tell the sovereign something he knows already — through you?"

George released the chair, and forgot his hands, which began to shake violently. Princess Corleone looked up and laid her head against the back of her chair. But she said nothing.

"Not only through me," the Prince muttered in grieved tones. "Something preceded my confidences, his own knowledge was enough — Madam. And it was devilish hard for me, Madam, worse for me than for him . . . 'pon my soul it was!" Even his chin was now shaking, and his shoulders rose and fell quickly as he breathed. "Fancy not knowing, Maria, whether one is worthy of having one's hand shaken or of being spat upon, or whether one is simply ridiculous — ridiculous!"

"Enough, Sire!" Steiner implored. The Princess did not stir. Prince George was no longer quite clear as to why he was so agitated. And as the sound of carriage wheels was heard, he returned to the window.

"A carriage!" he exclaimed, "coming from the Via Maggio — strange that they should let it pass!"

On the bridge, lanterns and torches swirled round the vehicle, and lit the body of the carriage up for a moment. Then some sort of force drove them away in all directions and the carriage rattled on, preceded by two mounted torch-bearers, who seemed to scare other lights away, when they barred the road. The car-

riage turned sharp to the right after leaving the bridge, and pulled up in front of the Palace.

"It is stopping here!" cried the Pretender.

"*Voilà!*" Steiner ejaculated ambiguously. Marie Corleone was silent.

Abate Vacca, who with a bodyguard of three evil-looking subordinate agents and denizens of darkness, was standing against the side of the quay opposite the doorway, so closely in touch with the majestic porter, that in a second without any exchange of words, and with but few magic signs and ingenious grimaces, he could immediately be informed of the crisis affairs had reached — Vacca was awaiting the unexpected. He felt convinced that it lay in the carriage that was rattling towards him, and sending his assistants forward under cover of the darkest shadows, he let himself drop on to the damp flags on which he was standing. Thus he crouched on the quay in the shadow of the parapet, barely recognisable, his face hidden up to his eyes behind his sleeve, in obedience to Caminer's warning. The carriage drew up right in front of him. When the two occupants alighted and stepped into the lighted portico, he no longer cursed the cold and damp that was penetrating through his coat. The matter was well worth the risk of a slight chill. Besides, could he not get up the moment the two men had entered?

As Princess Corleone did not stir and Prince George was neither sufficiently cool nor in a fit state to be seen, Steiner went out on to the stairs with the object more especially of preventing the servants from witnessing any unedifying scene. On the first floor he met del Monte who had forbidden the porter to accompany him, or make any of the usual announcements. A few steps lower down appeared the slight form of the Grand Duke. The old men exchanged a few words in whispers, Steiner taking no notice of the Grand Duke, returned upstairs, followed by the other two.

Princess Corleone was still at the table and Prince George was still at the window. Old Steiner, small and spruce,

remained standing in the great doorway, and bowed silently. The Grand Duke entered first. He looked boyish in his black civilian clothes, and was obviously embarrassed.

"Pray remain where you are, Baron," he said softly to Steiner, who was about to close the door behind del Monte. The Princess stared in silent astonishment at the new comers. The Grand Duke, with steps that were far from certain, went up to her and kissed her hand. Then he turned and bowed somewhat stiffly to the Pretender, who was strenuously endeavouring to overcome the disgraceful apathy of his shaking limbs. He was perfectly familiar with his condition, which was the result of absinthe drinking, and consisted of a state of fatigue so overpowering that he constantly fell asleep at faro, or found himself unable to hold the cards in his hands. He was half sitting on the broad marble window-sill and did not dare to move.

"Would you like to speak to the Princess alone?" he asked with heavy lips.

"Pray remain where you are, cousin," replied the Grand Duke calmly. "I only want to make sure of one or two things."

Maria Corleone made a slight movement with her hand. The Grand Duke sat down; between him and her there stood an empty chair. Del Monte and Steiner, the one very tall and the other very short, were standing close to the door, and occasionally looked at each other. The Grand Duke brushed the hair from his brow and kept his eyes on the table in front of him. He appeared to be collecting his thoughts, without paying any heed to the silence which became every moment more oppressive. Then he spoke very softly, without looking up, merely moving one hand gently and rhythmically.

"It is distressing that I should be here, very distressing, Madam — both for you and for me. But I must make certain about things — that is most important. We are both equally exposed to this test of endurance, I can assure you, Ma . . ."

He was going to say Maria; but as he was too honest to be adroit and change the word into Madam, he stopped altogether.

Maria Corleone looked kindly at him and said "Yes." He had deliberately come, he said, at a moment when, as he was fully aware, the Radical movement in the country had in all probability already been sapped of its strength.

"I know," he continued, speaking calmly now and looking at her, "that it is not a final decision, and I dare not think of what will one day happen. But for the moment we are concerned only with the present, and your position with regard to it."

"I have been expecting all this," the Princess replied, "and in my heart of hearts have even been longing for it. So you see, your Highness, I am no heroine!"

He noticed once again that she was a tired woman, and that the shadow lying between her and her beauty had already grown deeper.

"My God, I believe you," he said sadly, "but I cannot let it rest at that, although to most of the other questions, I should probably find the answers myself. But today, in any case, there will be another severe trial for you — and for me! I might, of course, have prevented them . . . no, that is not what I meant. I have ordered them to come here, because I thought it was necessary for you and for me. . . ."

Suddenly Prince George left the window, and without any conventional excuses, simply remarked that he felt he had no business to be present, and taking long strides on his tottering legs, left the room. Nobody turned to look at him. For a moment there was silence, which was broken by the Grand Duke enquiring abruptly whether it were true that she, the Princess, had been instrumental in having him warned in Venice about the plot in October. The question seemed to stir her strangely, and even sent a faint flush to her cheeks.

"It is not true, your Highness," she replied, speaking more loudly than before. "Not I, but Gasto Guerra was responsible for sending the warning."

The Grand Duke brushed the hair from his brow, but kept his hand to his temple as if he had a headache.

"Maria," he said, with emotion, forgetting the two old men at the door, "I can — I may possibly understand the answer. But very soon, probably in less than half an hour, I shall be able to ask the rebel Guerra whether that is true — to your face, *cara mia*. Do you still maintain it is true?"

"Yes! yes! yes!" she cried in anguish. "So help me Jesus, it is true! But why do you subject me to this examination?" She hesitated a moment, looked at him and continued, "me and yourself?"

"That is just the point," he murmured, looking away, and not attempting to answer her question. "That is just the point, and it has its deep meaning. And it serves no purpose, not even his." He raised his head. "And what about his sister?" he enquired.

"She is still here," replied the Princess a little bit anxiously. He gazed at her, his pallid brows twitching incessantly. The brother and sister would be confronted and then removed together, he said. Then, after a moment's pause, he added that he would like to see her. Maria Corleone became extremely agitated.

"Why? What for?" she asked excitedly, and leant towards him across the empty chair. "Why these brutal methods? I have my reasons for asking. . . ."

"Why not?" the Grand Duke retorted somewhat coldly. "I think you misunderstand me."

"Why not? — excuse me," interjected Steiner from the wall; "and I assure you that I understand your reasons very well, Princess."

"Then please go and fetch her, Steiner," said Maria Corleone, who had now turned pale.

Steiner asked one of the servants to conduct him to Madda's room. She was sitting at a table on which a little meal was spread. She stood up and looked suspicious when she recognised her visitor. Without any hesitation, the old man bade her follow him, as the Grand Duke was in the house, and wished to examine her personally. Madda, half closing her eyes, be-

trayed neither surprise nor alarm, but asked him to go into the next room for a moment, so that she might tidy herself. But the old man did not move, and merely shook his head.

"Poor child!" he said softly, "leave this foolish dallying with death to other people. Come just as you are, and forget that stupid pistol in the drawer."

Madda hesitated, declaring she did not know what he meant. He took her by the hand.

"Pity!" he said, "or so much the better! But the great Guerra whom you will soon see, would certainly have understood me."

She thought over his words for a moment, pulled a face as if she were going to laugh; and went with him. At the door she stopped and looked uneasily into his eyes. She seemed to want to say something; but all she did was to repeat as it were mechanically, the words he had just uttered:

"Pity!"

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Abate Vacca and the majestic porter were exchanging dumb signals regarding the situation, the latter reporting that Steiner had just left the dining-room and had gone upstairs to the "young lady," when there issued from a side alley in the Borgo Santi Apostoli a procession bearing torches. It turned into the Lungarno. Don Lionello's sharp eyes soon discovered two civilians among the busbies and the white uniforms of the Grenadiers. Guerra and Caminer were walking side by side like two friends, at the head of the procession. It was a solemn and impressive spectacle — and the face of the night would not have looked very different had it been the march of the insurgents. Vacca was conscious of this, neither could he control the doubts that surged to his mind at that moment regarding what manner of fate the victorious Chief of Police held in his hands. He felt that the rubicund creature was more capable than the pale dandy beside him, who was Guerra. And as the

wild current of his thoughts put the question, he replied to his soul that the arrest even of the sovereign himself would leave him colder than that of Madda Guerra, to prevent whose secret escape had been his distateful duty.

Caminer took him aside, and listened to what he had to report. He was, as usual, grave and friendly. Then he said:

"Listen, *Reverendo,* the subaltern in charge of the detachment of Grenadiers knows nothing about the exalted visitors in there. He has orders to take the Guerras to the Bargello. It will be your duty to point the brother and sister out to him, so there will be no need for you to know who the gentlemen in civilian clothes are. They will no doubt remain incognito. Do you understand? The order holds good and is to be carried out whatever happens, even if I personally should have to give way to certain sentimental considerations. The lieutenant has orders to fire if either of the Guerras should resist or should try to escape. And now let our Sovereign Lord have his final scene."

Don Lionello gazed after him, as he vanished with Guerra into the portico. He suddenly felt cold, possibly because he had been standing about so long. Rebel! Rebel! he said to himself, emphasising the rhythm of the words. The lieutenant, a delicate looking young man, stepped up to him and enquired whether all the exits from the Palace were being watched. Vacca replied in the affirmative.

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As del Monte left the room soon after Steiner, in order to await the arrival of Caminer and his prisoner on the stairs, the Grand Duke and Maria Corleone were left alone. She stood up and came behind him, speaking fast and low as she said:

"The girl is quite irresponsible and a moment ago had some wild idea about a fresh attempt on your life. That is why I resisted your suggestion, not because she is more beautiful than I am. But we can rely on Steiner."

"Really!" replied the Grand Duke wearily, with a faint groan. "But why should we stand so far apart?" he added plaintively. She seized him by the shoulder.

"What is it you want then?" she cried in a choking voice. "What is the object of this mysterious procedure? It is not like you! After all I stand convicted. Surely banishment would be simpler?"

He took hold of her hands and held them fast.

"That is not what I want, Maria," he said in grieved tones. "It is not a question of our mistakes, but of our — of my long love, of . . ."

There was a knock at the door. Madda entered. Steiner remained outside. Maria Corleone stood erect behind the Grand Duke's chair.

"Signorina Guerra," the Grand Duke enquired, "why do you wish to shoot me dead?"

Madda drew herself up gracefully and shook her head, but she did not reply. A few seconds later the door opened again. Madda had already seen the men below on the landing, and had held her peace in order to avoid creating difficulties for her brother by so much as a word. Guerra looked magnificent. His high open brow was at once gentle and compelling. He bowed low before the Princess, who returned to her place in great agitation, and not quite so low to the sovereign. Madda was radiant with unaccountable joy. For the first few moments Guerra gazed anxiously at her, after which he grew calm. The Grand Duke scrutinised the girl and Maria Corleone with close attention.

"Was Signor Guerra armed?" he asked at last of the Chief of Police, who was standing in the doorway, awaiting orders. Caminer replied in the negative. Whereupon the Grand Duke requested him to withdraw to the next room with the other two gentlemen and wait. When they had gone, he turned to the prisoners.

"Can you tell me, Signor Guerra, what induced you in October to tell the Princess of the danger threatening me?"

"Certainly, your Highness!" Guerra replied calmly. "The senselessness of such an act of terrorism."

"If there had been more sense in it, then, you would not have prevented it?"

"No, your Highness, if no more humane method were possible."

The Grand Duke nodded.

"And what are the humane means of escaping the more recent plot of which I have heard?"

Guerra's face twitched a little, as he replied:

"The fact that I am standing before you here."

"That is interesting," observed the Grand Duke. "Supposing that for reasons of gratitude I felt it incumbent upon me to give you back your freedom?"

"At the present moment it would not be of the slightest use to me," replied Guerra. Madda and Maria were gazing at him with eyes that burned into his face. He looked at the man.

"You are honest, Signor Guerra," said the Grand Duke very gravely. "But you stand in no danger of that happening to you. Do you still believe in your political aims?"

"I believe in the National Idea, your Highness. But it is still immature."

"And yet we shall both live to see it reach maturity, don't you think so?" he enquired.

"I believe so."

The Grand Duke was silent for a while, and looked at the Princess, who with wide open eyes and rapt attention was gazing at the handsome prisoner. He also looked at the sister, who was hanging on her brother's words with an expression that was a caress. The Grand Duke closed his eyes. He felt slight twinges in his temples. At last he asked:

"What have you to say in defence of the Princess?"

"The Princess," replied Guerra unhesitatingly, "was never for one moment a revolutionary in the active sense. She therefore stood outside the work of the Party. But she found herself

in a position which allowed her no alternative, owing to the extremely strict regulations of the Party."

"How long have you known the Princess?"

"Ten years!"

"Ten years!" the Grand Duke repeated softly, and sprang to his feet. He spoke with emotion. "Have you anything — anything private to say to the Princess, Signor Guerra?"

"No!" replied Guerra deeply moved. The Grand Duke went over to the door.

"One can never tell," he whispered, and went out.

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Ten minutes later, the Chief of Police appeared and begged the Guerras, in his courteous way, to follow him. Guerra was pale and calm. Madda was smiling with an air of relief. Maria Corleone was sitting at the large round table crying.

CONCLUSION

THERE were bad tidings enough for the Government on the following day — the effective declaration of independence by the town and province of Bologna, followed by that of the Marches, Umbria, and shortly afterwards, by that of four-fifths of the Papal States, as well as by the Dukedoms of Parma and Modena, which lay in the sphere of influence of Austria. As to the pitiful Lord of Modena, while on the 4th of February he was still demanding the services of the executioner against the insurgents, on the 5th he was already fleeing with his soldiers and the wounded leader of the rebels into neighbouring Austrian territory, despite the fact that the new masters in Bologna had not yet moved against him. But in Florence and Tuscany things remained quiet. The members of the Radical Party, who were for the moment deprived of their leader and of all orders, took care when the wave of insurrection was felt to pass from the north to Umbria, not to expose themselves to the mercy of the military machine which was run with such vigour and determination. One or two students' demonstrations which were more anti-clerical than radical and national in character, were wisely winked at by the authorities. A handful of demonstrators, chiefly from the Romagna and Modena, who at a gala performance at the Teatro della Pergola gave cheers for Guerra and the Constitution, were reduced to silence by the Grand Duke in person. With a faint smile he gave them the baffling assurance that he had had an opportunity of meeting Signor Guerra, and had found him a very decent and courageous fellow. The authorities were in a position to dispense with the help of the garrison and to allow the town to resume its normal life and even to hold its Carnival, long before the

Duke of Modena, with the help of Field-Marshal Bentheim and six thousand Austrian soldiers at his back, succeeded in recapturing his territory early in March and in reorganising the forces of reaction throughout Central Italy.

Then two events, which happened on the same day, though they had no connection with each other, the one interesting only a limited circle and the other the people at large, disturbed the joyous progress of the fête on the last Sunday of the Carnival. Early on the morning of that day Baron Steiner, for many reasons so well known in Florentine society, was found dead in bed, slightly doubled up on one side, his little hands folded almost tenderly about the handle of a dagger which bore the emblem of the Radical Party, and the blade of which was stuck deep into his left breast. A strange and puzzling feature of the affair was the fact that a fairly large piece of old Gobelin tapestry was found in the arms of the dead man, and had been as it were pinned to the body by the dagger. The authorities, probably in view of the prevailing excitement considered it advisable not to make the details public, and emphasised the possibility of suicide, as the result of unfortunate speculation.

That was the first, and it led Princess Corleone to leave for Rome on the very next day, in spite of the unsettled political condition of the Papal States, and contrary to the wishes of the sovereign, who wrote begging her, in order to deceive the sharp eyes of Court Society, to leave the town only when the Carnival was over.

The other was an abortive and somewhat ludicrous attempt on the life of the Grand Duke, during the traditional "Passeggio" of the masks under the Uffizi. The sovereign who was forced to witness the brutal end of the would-be assassin, immediately withdrew from the scene of festivities and did not even make his appearance in the evening at the Gala performance at the Pergola, which was the most fashionable ball of the Carnival, apparently, if we are to believe the description of a contemporary journalist, a sort of phantasmagoria, a legend or vision.

Old Steiner had been in a good mood that Saturday night. Why, he was somewhat puzzled to know, unless it was that he had been able to put the unedifying events of the last few weeks behind him and resume his hermit's life among his treasures. Maria Corleone was then thoroughly disgruntled as well as irritated by the sovereign's remarkable consistency, which had made him leave her room, and her house, and not wish to see her again. Maria Corleone, the old man thought, will go and live for a while in Rome, a wise move in view of possible reprisals by the Party, and if she is clever, she will find another lover while there is yet time, or else return to Florence two years hence, and quietly resume her old position. And the pedant, thought the old man with a smile, will not even have her unfinished embroidery removed from the corner she usually works in at the Villino near San Miniato. As for poor Prince George, who would be chivalrous enough to accompany her, his decrepitude was so far advanced that his claims as Pretender were no longer regarded seriously even by the great northern Power in question, and old Steiner has been relieved of his duties of supervision. He was indeed free, and so utterly useless that the shadow of death, which he scented in the air about him, caused him neither a shudder nor a qualm.

Possibly he was pleased when a gentlemen, or rather a mask, called late on Saturday afternoon, and muttering some insignificant name, offered to sell him an immensely valuable object —a piece of that rare hand-sewn symbolical tapestry with which the Ghetto Jews in Rome had been forced to decorate the Arch of Titus, on the occasion of the coronation of a Pope in the 17th century. It represented a pelican giving its blood to a boy to drink, with a quotation from the Psalms above it. The price demanded was exceedingly high and the bargain had not been concluded, as the wearer of the mask wished to consult his employer, whom he would meet at the garden party at Marchese Torrigiano's. He promised to bring it back at ten o'clock.

The whole tale might be a fabrication. But the piece of Gobelin tapestry itself was no fabrication. Unfortunately the suspicious fellow had taken it away with him. Perhaps he will not return, thought Steiner, leaning out of the window, as the bell of San Lorenzo struck the hour of ten. The mist was so thick that night that he could hardly discern the outline of the church. The street lamps hung tired and grey in rings of mist. It seemed to the old man as if whispering forms were standing about his house. But he could distinguish nothing, nor did he take much trouble to do so. At one moment — because his mind was once again turning on death — he thought of waking his servant. But at that moment there was a knock on the door downstairs — three knocks such as the messengers of secret courts in the Middle Ages used to give, thought Steiner carelessly — and he went down to open the door himself.

Before him stood the same robust, somewhat thickset man, in the strange black clothes, with trunk hose and a jacket fitting tightly at the waist and bulging out over his powerful hips. A somewhat gloomy Roger van der Weyden, said Steiner to himself, or a shrewd St. Simonist. On reaching his study he turned the lamp on to the stranger.

"You would do me a favour," he said, "if you would now take off that mask. I do not like such things when I am transacting business."

"But you do not know, dear Baron," said the stranger in a stronge North-Italian accent, "whether I have not my own reasons for keeping it on."

"I see," replied Steiner, and looking at the long parcel which the man was carrying, he added, "Well show it to me again!"

He spoke quite calmly, although he saw with terrible distinctness what the next minute was to bring. Nevertheless, he felt that such an end to life would be neither frightful nor undignified.

With a curious movement, the stranger unrolled the paper and the material, holding his right hand behind it. Old Steiner saw the pelican pecking its breast and he also saw the blood.

And then, all of a sudden, the pelican shot out at him and thrust its beak with mad fury into his breast!

He felt no pain and pressed the bird to him. The stranger, who already seemed to be encircled with mist, like the lamps in the street, bent over him, and with a face that appeared to be disintegrating, felt in Steiner's dressing-gown for the key of the front door, and was gone.

With the pelican's beak in his breast, it was no effort to the old man to take ten paces in the bedroom. He even felt as if he were already using not the legs but the wings of the bird to cover the distance. He reached his bed without difficulty, and protecting his legs and body from the thick drops of blood by means of his good and trusty dressing-gown, just had sufficent strength to turn on his left side, which, after all, was the heaviest.

* * * * *

The usefulness of his bed and of his apathy had been so overwhelmingly proved to Gioia that he continued to lie in it, dumb and obtuse, even when the peace of the Cortacce was no longer disturbed. Salomone's housekeeper, who looked after him, always brought him all manner of news on her visits, not because she was suspicious of his condition, but because she was naturally talkative and was still full of horror at all that had happened, and at the arrest of her master. Gioia listened and took in her words, but his addled brain, which had only through instinct and long practice used the means nearest to hand to secure his own safety, ultimately forgot the connection of what he heard with his own fate. The tranquillity about him was pleasant, and the oft-repeated words, "arrest," "police," and "Party," were hardly more than shadows and points on the fringe of his dull and peace-loving imagination. He could not picture Checca's death, therefore it was improbable, and as deeply enveloped in the mist of a low fever as the rest of the distant scene in which he had heard about it.

After a while he became faintly uneasy; but it was an un-

easiness that came not from without but from within. It came from his veins, which began to throb wildly whenever his thoughts turned in a certain direction. He left his bed and spent his days at the door of his room, opposite the broken window with the faithful spider, which dropped down to the coffee he offered it, without hesitation or reproach, as if there had been no long and dark interruption. The spider was kind and tried not to allow anything unusual to happen. He saw the little patch of sky as well, with its grey clouds and meagre sunlight, and when the sun did shine, it seemed devoid both of strength and malice. But these pleasant things prevailed ever less and less against a certain gloomy call to duty, something compelling and urgent which lurked behind him, blocking the broad and beautiful landscape behind, like a rude neighbour. He could no longer feel his secret joys, and even his little snatches of music sounded feeble and moribund behind the obstacle, and gave him little pleasure, stifling rather than enriching him. Nor could he any longer visualise the violin or the familiar scenes in Rome, or the Checca of former days. But the depressing things, the sinful things, came creeping towards him from all directions, even out of the past, and there were nights when he sweated with horror and his breath almost forsook him, because the room in Toulon, with no Checca in it, but only with its weight of infamy and malediction, closed about him. There must be a reason for this, he brooded, an omission, a neglect of duty. And his ears suddenly became very keen; he listened and listened. At last the message grew more distinct. He was sitting in the front of his little room, leaning against the wall, and Checca was speaking from the back, without allowing herself to be seen, as she had so often done when she had unpleasant orders to hand on, and he had pleaded infirmity. Incidentally it did not occur to him to do so now. He was neither deaf, besotted nor paralysed. The deed to be done would have to be done! He saw that quite clearly. His ears were so keen and his mind so alert, that he knew when Checca's voice took on the tone and words of the

great Guerra. And this time he did not hesitate, as on many a previous occasion when he had said No, and a long night had changed it to Yes. He said Yes immediately, and stood up, ready for action. He went out into the street. As good luck would have it, Salomone's chatterbox of a housekeeper did not cross his path.

He lurched on, with difficulty, it is true, owing to the long spell of inactivity, and very slowly; nevertheless he advanced, and soon recovered the complicated technique of his customary gait. He was strangely, almost delightfully indifferent to the streets and the people in them — to the people more than to the streets, which after all, lead to his goal. It seemed a long while before he reached the wretched quarter of the Via Campuccio; but he got there. He also saw Guillotine at his beer-bar, and beckoned him almost peremptorily into a quiet corner.

"Important orders!" he said, mouthing his words, for he had almost forgotten how to speak. "I want a pistol — loaded — important orders."

"What?" exclaimed the athlete in astonishment. "You, and at this time of day?"

"G.G.," replied Gioia. Guillotine led him into a room and handed him the weapon.

"Paper," Gioia demanded. "I must shoot from behind some paper."

"Nonsense!" said Guillotine. "A coat is better."

And he gave him a sort of highwayman's cloak with three capes, the longest of which reached down to his hips. Gioia shook his head, but allowed the man to put it on him. As his crippled hand made the cloak bulge about his right shoulder, he looked even more crippled than he really was. Guillotine even laughed — that is to say, as much as his rugged chin would allow him.

Then Gioia took up his stand behind one of the double columns of the Uffizi, on the Arno front. He was a little bit bewildered. There were crowds of people about him, and policemen as well. Two smart dragoon officers stood leaning on their

swords, almost at his elbow, against the chain which separated the colonnade from the street, cheerfully watching the gaily dressed throng. Their swords worried the old man; they caught the light of the sun, and sent shafts of it sideways behind his glasses into his sensitive eyes. Moreover, in the stream of masks and dandies before him, he had not the faintest idea which was the Grand Duke. But suddenly a huge wave seemed to pass through the crowd. People were cheering and pressing forward, and surging round Louis XIV who was leading by the hand a lady with ostrich feathers in her hair.

" Il Granduca! " cried one of the dragoon officers, and struck the ground several times with his terrible sword.

Gioia snatched out the pistol. But, under his cloak, it was difficult to rest the barrel against his crippled arm, and cock the trigger, possibly because it was a very old weapon. He moved his begging hand about desperately under the cloak. One of the dragoon officers began to notice him. The shot was fired before the barrel had been extricated from the folds of the cloak, and hit the old man in the throat. But a shot had been fired, there was a cloud of smoke, and much confusion — and as the dragoon officer felt that the opportunity to use his fine sword in earnest had come at last, he slashed it about the head of the old man who was already spinning round before falling. But he soon saw that the blow had been quite unnecessary.

The cloak had glided from the shoulders of the victim. Even his crippled hand wanted to release itself from life's fetters. But his gigantic thumb stood erect and projected like a broken signpost into the air!

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

This book is set on the Linotype in Granjon, a type which is neither a copy of a classic face nor an original creation. George W. Jones drew the basic design for this type from classic sources, but deviated from his model wherever four centuries of type-cutting experience indicated an improvement or where modern methods of punch-cutting made possible a refinement that was beyond the skill of the sixteenth-century originator. This new creation is based primarily upon the type used by Claude Garamond (1510–1561) in his beautiful French books and more closely resembles the work of the founder of the Old Style letter than do any of the various modern-day types that bear his name.

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